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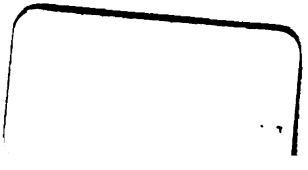

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THE WORKS

OF

MATTHEW ARNOLD

IN

FIFTEEN VOLUMES

VOLUME II

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POEMS

BY

MATTHEW ARNOLD

VOLUME II

London
MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
SMITH, ELDER AND COMPANY
1903

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LYRIC POEMS

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SWITZERLAND

1. MEETING

AGAIN I see my bliss at hand,
The town, the lake are here;
My Marguerite smiles upon the strand,[1]
Unalter'd with the year.

I know that graceful figure fair,
That cheek of languid hue;
I know that soft, enkerchief'd hair,
And those sweet eyes of blue.

Again I spring to make my choice;
Again in tones of ire
I hear a God's tremendous voice:
'Be counsell'd, and retire.'

Ye guiding Powers who join and part,
What would ye have with me?
Ah, warn some more ambitious heart,
And let the peaceful be!

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2. PARTING

Ye storm-winds of Autumn !
Who rush by, who shake
The window, and ruffle
The gleam-lighted lake ;
Who cross to the hill-side
Thin-sprinkled with farms,
Where the high woods strip sadly
Their yellowing arms—
Ye are bound for the mountains !
Ah ! with you let me go
Where your cold, distant barrier,
The vast range of snow,
Through the loose clouds lifts dimly
Its white peaks in air—
How deep is their stillness !
Ah, would I were there !

But on the stairs what voice is this I hear,
Buoyant as morning, and as morning clear ?
Say, has some wet bird-haunted English lawn
Lent it the music of its trees at dawn ?
Or was it from some sun-fleck'd mountain-brook
That the sweet voice its upland clearness took ?
Ah ! it comes nearer—
Sweet notes, this way !

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SWITZERLAND

Hark ! fast by the window
The rushing winds go,
To the ice-cumber'd gorges,
The vast seas of snow !
There the torrents drive upward
Their rock-strangled hum ;
There the avalanche thunders
The hoarse torrent dumb.
—I come, O ye mountains !
Ye torrents, I come !

But who is this, by the half-open'd door,
Whose figure casts a shadow on the floor ?
The sweet blue eyes—the soft, ash-colour'd hair—
The cheeks that still their gentle paleness wear—
The lovely lips, with their arch smile that tells
The unconquer'd joy in which her spirit dwells—
Ah ! they bend nearer—
Sweet lips, this way !

Hark ! the wind rushes past us !
Ah ! with that let me go
To the clear, waning hill-side,
Unspotted by snow,
There to watch, o'er the sunk vale,
The frore mountain-wall,
Where the niched snow-bed sprays down
Its powdery fall.
There its dusky blue clusters
The aconite spreads ;
There the pines slope, the cloud-strips

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Hung soft in their heads.
No life but, at moments,
The mountain-bee's hum.
—I come, O ye mountains!
Ye pine-woods, I come!

Forgive me! forgive me!
Ah, Marguerite, fain
Would these arms reach to clasp thee!
But see! 'tis in vain.

In the void air, towards thee,
My stretch'd arms are cast;
But a sea rolls between us—
Our different past!

To the lips, ah! of others
Those lips have been prest,
And others, ere I was,
Were strain'd to that breast;

Far, far from each other
Our spirits have grown;
And what heart knows another?
Ah! who knows his own?

Blow, ye winds! lift me with you!
I come to the wild.
Fold closely, O Nature!
Thine arms round thy child.

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SWITZERLAND

To thee only God granted
A heart ever new—
To all always open,
To all always true.

Ah! calm me, restore me;
And dry up my tears
On thy high mountain-platforms,
Where morn first appears;

Where the white mists, for ever,
Are spread and upfurl'd—
In the stir of the forces
Whence issued the world.

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3. A FAREWELL

My horse's feet beside the lake,
Where sweet the unbroken moonbeams lay,
Sent echoes through the night to wake
Each glistening strand, each heath-fringed bay.

The poplar avenue was pass'd,
And the roof'd bridge that spans the stream ;
Up the steep street I hurried fast,
Led by thy taper's starlike beam.

I came ! I saw thee rise !—the blood
Pour'd flushing to thy languid cheek.
Lock'd in each other's arms we stood,
In tears, with hearts too full to speak.

Days flew ;—ah, soon I could discern
A trouble in thine alter'd air !
Thy hand lay languidly in mine,
Thy cheek was grave, thy speech grew rare.

I blame thee not !—this heart, I know
To be long loved was never framed ;
For something in its depths doth glow
Too strange, too restless, too untamed.

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And women—things that live and move
Mined by the fever of the soul—
They seek to find in those they love
Stern strength, and promise of control.

They ask not kindness, gentle ways—
These they themselves have tried and known ;
They ask a soul which never sways
With the blind gusts that shake their own.

I too have felt the load I bore
In a too strong emotion's sway ;
I too have wish'd, no woman more,
This starting, feverish heart away.

I too have long'd for trenchant force,
And will like a dividing spear ;
Have praised the keen, unscrupulous course,
Which knows no doubt, which feels no fear.

But in the world I learnt, what there
Thou too wilt surely one day prove,
That will, that energy, though rare,
Are yet far, far less rare than love.

Go, then !—till time and fate impress
This truth on thee, be mine no more !
They will !—for thou, I feel, not less
Than I, wast destined to this lore.

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We school our manners, act our parts—
But He, who sees us through and through,
Knows that the bent of both our hearts
Was to be gentle, tranquil, true.

And though we wear out life, alas!
Distracted as a homeless wind,
In beating where we must not pass,
In seeking what we shall not find;

Yet we shall one day gain, life past,
Clear prospect o'er our being's whole;
Shall see ourselves, and learn at last
Our true affinities of soul.

We shall not then deny a course
To every thought the mass ignore;
We shall not then call hardness force,
Nor lightness wisdom any more.

Then, in the eternal Father's smile,
Our soothed, encouraged souls will dare
To seem as free from pride and guile,
As good, as generous, as they are.

Then we shall know our friends!—though much
Will have been lost—the help in strife,
The thousand sweet, still joys of such
As hand in hand face earthly life—

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SWITZERLAND

Though these be lost, there will be yet
A sympathy august and pure ;
Ennobled by a vast regret,
And by contrition seal'd thrice sure.

And we, whose ways were unlike here,
May then more neighbouring courses ply ;
May to each other be brought near,
And greet across infinity.

How sweet, unreach'd by earthly jars,
My sister ! to maintain with thee
The hush among the shining stars,
The calm upon the moonlit sea !

How sweet to feel, on the boon air,
All our unquiet pulses cease !
To feel that nothing can impair
The gentleness, the thirst for peace—

The gentleness too rudely hurl'd
On this wild earth of hate and fear ;
The thirst for peace a raving world
Would never let us satiate here.

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4. ISOLATION. TO MARGUERITE

We were apart; yet, day by day,
I bade my heart more constant be.
I bade it keep the world away,
And grow a home for only thee;
Nor fear'd but thy love likewise grew,
Like mine, each day, more tried, more true.

The fault was grave! I might have known,
What far too soon, alas! I learn'd—
The heart can bind itself alone,
And faith may oft be unreturn'd.
Self-sway'd our feelings ebb and swell—
Thou lov'st no more;—Farewell! Farewell!

Farewell!—and thou, thou lonely heart,
Which never yet without remorse
Even for a moment didst depart
From thy remote and sphered course
To haunt the place where passions reign—
Back to thy solitude again!

Back! with the conscious thrill of shame
Which Luna felt, that summer-night,
Flash through her pure immortal frame,

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SWITZERLAND

When she forsook the starry height
To hang over Endymion's sleep
Upon the pine-grown Latmian steep.

Yet she, chaste queen, had never proved
How vain a thing is mortal love,
Wandering in Heaven, far removed.
But thou hast long had place to prove
This truth—to prove, and make thine own,
'Thou hast been, shalt be, art, alone.'

Or, if not quite alone, yet they
Which touch thee are unmating things—
Ocean and clouds and night and day;
Lorn autumns and triumphant springs;
And life, and others' joy and pain,
And love, if love, of happier men.

Of happier men—for they, at least,
Have *dream'd* two human hearts might blend
In one, and were through faith released
From isolation without end
Prolong'd; nor knew, although not less
Alone than thou, their loneliness.

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5. TO MARGUERITE—CONTINUED

Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live *alone*.
The islands feel the enclasping flow,
And then their endless bounds they know.

But when the moon their hollows lights,
And they are swept by balms of spring,
And in their glens, on starry nights,
The nightingales divinely sing;
And lovely notes, from shore to shore,
Across the sounds and channels pour—

Oh! then a longing like despair
Is to their farthest caverns sent;
For surely once, they feel, we were
Parts of a single continent!
Now round us spreads the watery plain—
Oh might our marges meet again!

Who order'd, that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd?
Who renders vain their deep desire?—
A God, a God their severance ruled!
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea.

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6. ABSENCE

In this fair stranger's eyes of grey
Thine eyes, my love! I see.
I shiver; for the passing day
Had borne me far from thee.

This is the curse of life! that not
A nobler, calmer train
Of wiser thoughts and feelings blot
Our passions from our brain;

But each day brings its petty dust
Our soon-choked souls to fill,
And we forget because we must
And not because we will.

I struggle towards the light; and ye,
Once-long'd-for storms of love!
If with the light ye cannot be,
I bear that ye remove.

I struggle towards the light—but oh,
While yet the night is chill,
Upon time's barren, stormy flow,
Stay with me, Marguerite, still!

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7. THE TERRACE AT BERNE

(COMPOSED TEN YEARS AFTER THE PRECEDING)

TEN years !—and to my waking eye
Once more the roofs of Berne appear ;
The rocky banks, the terrace high,
The stream !—and do I linger here ?

The clouds are on the Oberland,
The Jungfrau snows look faint and far ;
But bright are those green fields at hand,
And through those fields comes down the Aar,

And from the blue twin-lakes it comes,
Flows by the town, the church-yard fair ;
And 'neath the garden-walk it hums,
The house !—and is my Marguerite there ?

Ah, shall I see thee, while a flush
Of startled pleasure floods thy brow,
Quick through the oleanders brush,
And clap thy hands, and cry : *'Tis thou !*

Or hast thou long since wander'd back,
Daughter of France ! to France, thy home ;
And flitted down the flowery track
Where feet like thine too lightly come ?

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Doth riotous laughter now replace
Thy smile ; and rouge, with stony glare,
Thy cheek's soft hue ; and fluttering lace
The kerchief that enwound thy hair ?

Or is it over ?—art thou dead ?—
Dead !—and no warning shiver ran
Across my heart, to say thy thread
Of life was cut, and closed thy span !

Could from earth's ways that figure slight
Be lost, and I not feel 'twas so ?
Of that fresh voice the gay delight
Fail from earth's air, and I not know ?

Or shall I find thee still, but changed,
But not the Marguerite of thy prime ?
With all thy being re-arranged,
Pass'd through the crucible of time ;

With spirit vanish'd, beauty waned,
And hardly yet a glance, a tone,
A gesture—anything—retain'd
Of all that was my Marguerite's own ?

I will not know ! For wherefore try,
To things by mortal course that live,
A shadowy durability,
For which they were not meant, to give ?

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Like driftwood spars, which meet and pass
Upon the boundless ocean-plain,
So on the sea of life, alas !
Man meets man—meets, and quits again.

I knew it when my life was young ;
I feel it still, now youth is o'er.
—The mists are on the mountain hung,
And Marguerite I shall see no more.

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THE STRAYED REVELLER

THE PORTICO OF CIRCE'S PALACE. EVENING

A Youth. Circe

The Youth

FASTER, faster,
O Circe, Goddess,
Let the wild, thronging train,
The bright procession
Of eddying forms,
Sweep through my soul!

Thou standest, smiling
Down on me! thy right arm,
Lean'd up against the column there,
Props thy soft cheek;
Thy left holds, hanging loosely,
The deep cup, ivy-cinctured,
I held but now.

Is it, then, evening
So soon? I see, the night-dews,

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Cluster'd in thick beads, dim
The agate brooch-stones
On thy white shoulder ;
The cool night-wind, too,
Blows through the portico,
Stirs thy hair, Goddess,
Waves thy white robe !

Circe

Whence art thou, sleeper ?

The Youth

When the white dawn first
Through the rough fir-planks
Of my hut, by the chestnuts,
Up at the valley-head,
Came breaking, Goddess !
I sprang up, I threw round me
My dappled fawn-skin ;
Passing out, from the wet turf,
Where they lay, by the hut door,
I snatch'd up my vine-crown, my fir-staff,
All drench'd in dew—
Came swift down to join
The rout early gather'd
In the town, round the temple,
Iacchus' white fane
On yonder hill.

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THE STRAYED REVELLER

Quick I pass'd, following
The wood-cutters' cart-track
Down the dark valley ;—I saw
On my left, through the beeches,
Thy palace, Goddess,
Smokeless, empty !
Trembling, I enter'd ; beheld
The court all silent,
The lions sleeping,
On the altar this bowl.
I drank, Goddess !
And sank down here, sleeping,
On the steps of thy portico.

Circe

Foolish boy ! Why tremblest thou ?
Thou lovest it, then, my wine ?
Wouldst more of it ? See, how glows,
Through the delicate, flush'd marble,
The red, creaming liquor,
Strown with dark seeds !
Drink, then ! I chide thee not,
Deny thee not my bowl.
Come, stretch forth thy hand, then—so !
Drink—drink again !

The Youth

Thanks, gracious one !
Ah, the sweet fumes again !

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More soft, ah me,
More subtle-winding
Than Pan's flute-music !
Faint—faint ! Ah me,
Again the sweet sleep !

Circe

Hist ! Thou—within there !
Come forth, Ulysses !
Art tired with hunting ?
While we range the woodland,
See what the day brings.

Ulysses

Ever new magic !
Hast thou then lured hither,
Wonderful Goddess, by thy art,
The young, languid-eyed Ampelus,
Iacchus' darling—
Or some youth beloved of Pan,
Of Pan and the Nymphs ?
That he sits, bending downward
His white, delicate neck
To the ivy-wreathed marge
Of thy cup ; the bright, glancing vine-leaves
That crown his hair,
Falling forward, mingling
With the dark ivy-plants—
His fawn-skin, half untied,

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Smear'd with red wine-stains? Who is he,
That he sits, overweigh'd
By fumes of wine and sleep,
So late, in thy portico?
What youth, Goddess,—what guest
Of Gods or mortals?

Circe

Hist! he wakes!
I lured him not hither, Ulysses.
Nay, ask him!

The Youth

Who speaks? Ah, who comes forth
To thy side, Goddess, from within?
How shall I name him?
This spare, dark-featured,
Quick-eyed stranger?
Ah, and I see too
His sailor's bonnet,
His short coat, travel-tarnish'd,
With one arm bare!—
Art thou not he, whom fame
This long time rumours
The favour'd guest of Circe, brought by the waves?
Art thou he, stranger?
The wise Ulysses,
Laertes' son?

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Ulysses

I am Ulysses.
And thou, too, sleeper?
Thy voice is sweet.
It may be thou hast follow'd
Through the islands some divine bard,
By age taught many things,
Age and the Muses;
And heard him delighting
The chiefs and people
In the banquet, and learn'd his songs,
Of Gods and Heroes,
Of war and arts,
And peopled cities,
Inland, or built
By the grey sea.—If so, then hail!
I honour and welcome thee.

The Youth

The Gods are happy.
They turn on all sides
Their shining eyes,
And see below them
The earth and men.

They see Tiresias
Sitting, staff in hand,
On the warm, grassy
Asopus bank,

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His robe drawn over
His old, sightless head,
Revolving inly
The doom of Thebes.

They see the Centaurs
In the upper glens
Of Pelion, in the streams,
Where red-berried ashes fringe
The clear-brown shallow pools,
With streaming flanks, and heads
Rear'd proudly, snuffing
The mountain wind.

They see the Indian
Drifting, knife in hand,
His frail boat moor'd to
A floating isle thick-matted
With large-leaved, low-creeping melon-plants,
And the dark cucumber.
He reaps, and stows them,
Drifting—drifting;—round him,
Round his green harvest-plot,
Flow the cool lake-waves,
The mountains ring them.

They see the Scythian
On the wide stepp, unharnessing
His wheel'd house at noon.
He tethers his beast down, and makes his meal—
Mares' milk, and bread

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Baked on the embers ;—all around
The boundless, waving grass-plains stretch, thick-
starr'd
With saffron and the yellow hollyhock
And flag-leaved iris-flowers.
Sitting in his cart
He makes his meal ; before him, for long miles,
Alive with bright green lizards,
And the springing bustard-fowl,
The track, a straight black line,
Furrows the rich soil ; here and there
Clusters of lonely mounds
Topp'd with rough-hewn,
Grey, rain-blear'd statues, overpeer
The sunny waste.

They see the ferry
On the broad, clay-laden
Lone Chorasmian stream ;—thereon,
With snort and strain,
Two horses, strongly swimming, tow
The ferry-boat, with woven ropes
To either bow
Firm harness'd by the mane ; a chief,
With shout and shaken spear,
Stands at the prow, and guides them ; but astern
The cowering merchants, in long robes,
Sit pale beside their wealth
Of silk-bales and of balsam-drops,
Of gold and ivory,
Of turquoise-earth and amethyst,

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Jasper and chalcedony,
And milk-barr'd onyx-stones.
The loaded boat swings groaning
In the yellow eddies;
The Gods behold them.

They see the Heroes
Sitting in the dark ship
On the foamless, long-heaving,
Violet sea,
At sunset nearing
The Happy Islands.

These things, Ulysses,
The wise bards also
Behold and sing.
But oh, what labour!
O prince, what pain!

They too can see
Tiresias;—but the Gods,
Who give them vision,
Added this law:
That they should bear too
His groping blindness,
His dark foreboding,
His scorn'd white hairs;
Bear Hera's anger
Through a life lengthen'd
To seven ages.

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They see the Centaurs
On Pelion ;—then they feel,
They too, the maddening wine
Swell their large veins to bursting ; in wild pain
They feel the biting spears
Of the grim Lapithæ, and Theseus, drive,
Drive crashing through their bones ; they feel
High on a jutting rock in the red stream
Alcmena's dreadful son
Ply his bow ;—such a price
The Gods exact for song :
To become what we sing.

They see the Indian
On his mountain lake ; but squalls
Make their skiff reel, and worms
In the unkind spring have gnawn
Their melon-harvest to the heart.—They see
The Scythian ; but long frosts
Parch them in winter-time on the bare stepp,
Till they too fade like grass ; they crawl
Like shadows forth in spring.

They see the merchants
On the Oxus stream ;—but care
Must visit first them too, and make them pale.
Whether, through whirling sand,
A cloud of desert robber-horse have burst
Upon their caravan ; or greedy kings,
In the wall'd cities the way passes through,
Crush'd them with tolls ; or fever-airs,

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On some great river's marge,
Mown them down, far from home.

They see the Heroes
Near harbour ;—but they share
Their lives, and former violent toil in Thebes,
Seven-gated Thebes, or Troy ;
Or where the echoing oars
Of Argo first
Startled the unknown sea.

The old Silenus
Came, lolling in the sunshine,
From the dewy forest-coverts,
This way, at noon.
Sitting by me, while his Fauns
Down at the water-side
Sprinkled and smoothed
His drooping garland,
He told me these things.

But I, Ulysses,
Sitting on the warm steps,
Looking over the valley,
All day long, have seen,
Without pain, without labour,
Sometimes a wild-hair'd Mænad—
Sometimes a Faun with torches—
And sometimes, for a moment,
Passing through the dark stems
Flowing-robed, the beloved,

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The desired, the divine,
Beloved Iacchus.

Ah, cool night-wind, tremulous stars!
Ah, glimmering water,
Fitful earth-murmur,
Dreaming woods!
Ah, golden-hair'd, strangely smiling Goddess,
And thou, proved, much enduring,
Wave-toss'd Wanderer!
Who can stand still?
Ye fade, ye swim, ye waver before me—
The cup again!

Faster, faster,
O Circe, Goddess,
Let the wild, thronging train,
The bright procession
Of eddying forms,
Sweep through my soul!

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FRAGMENT OF AN 'ANTIGONE'

The Chorus

WELL hath he done who hath seized happiness !
For little do the all-containing hours,
Though opulent, freely give.
Who, weighing that life well
Fortune presents unpray'd,
Declines her ministry, and carves his own ;
And, justice not infringed,
Makes his own welfare his unswerved-from law.

He does well too, who keeps that clue the mild
Birth-Goddess and the austere Fates first gave.
For from the day when these
Bring him, a weeping child,
First to the light, and mark
A country for him, kinsfolk, and a home,
Unguided he remains,
Till the Fates come again, this time with death.

In little companies,
And, our own place once left,
Ignorant where to stand, or whom to avoid,

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By city and household group'd, we live; and many shocks
Our order heaven-ordain'd
Must every day endure:
Voyages, exiles, hates, dissensions, wars.
Besides what waste *he* makes,
The all-hated, order-breaking,
Without friend, city, or home,
Death, who dissevers all.

Him then I praise, who dares
To self-selected good
Prefer obedience to the primal law,
Which consecrates the ties of blood; for these, indeed,
Are to the Gods a care;
That touches but himself.
For every day man may be link'd and loosed
With strangers; but the bond
Original, deep-inwound,
Of blood, can he not bind,
Nor, if Fate binds, not bear.

But hush! Hæmon, whom Antigone,
Robbing herself of life in burying,
Against Creon's law, Polynices,
Robs of a loved bride—pale, imploring,
Waiting her passage,
Forth from the palace hitherward comes.

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FRAGMENT OF AN 'ANTIGONE'

Hæmon

No, no, old men, Creon I curse not!
I weep, Thebans,
One than Creon crueller far!
For he, he, at least, by slaying her,
August laws doth mightily vindicate;
But thou, too-bold, headstrong, pitiless!
Ah me!—honourest more than thy lover,
O Antigone!
A dead, ignorant, thankless corpse.

The Chorus

Nor was the love untrue
Which the Dawn-Goddess bore
To that fair youth she erst,
Leaving the salt sea-beds
And coming flush'd over the stormy frith
Of loud Euripus, saw—
Saw and snatch'd, wild with love,
From the pine-dotted spurs
Of Parnes, where thy waves,
Asopus! gleam rock-hemm'd—
The Hunter of the Tanagræan Field.[2]

But him, in his sweet prime,
By severance immature,
By Artemis' soft shafts,
She, though a Goddess born,

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Saw in the rocky isle of Delos die.
Such end o'ertook that love.
For she desired to make
Immortal mortal man,
And blend his happy life,
Far from the Gods, with hers;
To him postponing an eternal law.

Hæmon

But like me, she, wroth, complaining,
Succumb'd to the envy of unkind Gods;
And, her beautiful arms unclasping,
Her fair youth unwillingly gave.

The Chorus

Nor, though enthroned too high
To fear assault of envious Gods,
His beloved Argive seer would Zeus retain
From his appointed end

In this our Thebes; but when
His flying steeds came near
To cross the steep Ismenian glen,
The broad earth open'd, and whelm'd them and him;
And through the void air sang
At large his enemy's spear.

And fain would Zeus have saved his tired son
Beholding him where the Two Pillars stand

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FRAGMENT OF AN 'ANTIGONE'

O'er the sun-redden'd western straits,[8]
Or at his work in that dim lower world.
Fain would he have recall'd
The fraudulent oath which bound
To a much feebler wight the heroic man.

But he preferr'd Fate to his strong desire.
Nor did there need less than the burning pile
Under the towering Trachis crags,
And the Spercheios vale, shaken with groans,
And the roused Maliac gulph,
And scared Œtæan snows,
To achieve his son's deliverance, O my child!

Digitized by Google

FRAGMENT OF CHORUS OF A 'DEJANEIRA'

O FRIVOLOUS mind of man,
Light ignorance, and hurrying, unsure thoughts!
Though man bewails you not,
How *I* bewail you!

Little in your prosperity
Do you seek counsel of the Gods.
Proud, ignorant, self-adored, you live alone.
In profound silence stern,
Among their savage gorges and cold springs,
Unvisited remain
The great oracular shrines.

Thither in your adversity
Do you betake yourselves for light,
But strangely misinterpret all you hear.
For you will not put on
New hearts with the enquirer's holy robe,
And purged, considerate minds.

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FRAGMENT OF A 'DEJANEIRA'

And him on whom, at the end
Of toil and dolour untold,
The Gods have said that repose
At last shall descend undisturb'd—
Him you expect to behold
In an easy old age, in a happy home;
No end but this you praise.

But him, on whom, in the prime
Of life, with vigour undimm'd,
With unspent mind, and a soul
Unworn, undebased, undecay'd,
Mournfully grating, the gates
Of the city of death have for ever closed—
Him, I count *him*, well-starr'd.

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EARLY DEATH AND FAME

For him who must see many years,
I praise the life which slips away
Out of the light and mutely ; which avoids
Fame, and her less fair followers, envy, strife,
Stupid detraction, jealousy, cabal,
Insincere praises ; which descends
The quiet mossy track to age.

But, when immature death
Beckons too early the guest
From the half-tried banquet of life,
Young, in the bloom of his days ;
Leaves no leisure to press,
Slow and surely, the sweets
Of a tranquil life in the shade—
Fuller for him be the hours !
Give him emotion, though pain !
Let him live, let him feel : *I have lived.*
Heap up his moments with life !
Triple his pulses with fame !

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PHILOMELA

HARK ! ah, the nightingale—
The tawny-throated !
Hark, from that moonlit cedar what a burst !
What triumph ! hark !—what pain !

O wanderer from a Grecian shore,
Still, after many years, in distant lands,
Still nourishing in thy bewilder'd brain
That wild, unquench'd, deep-sunken, old-world pain—
Say, will it never heal ?
And can this fragrant lawn
With its cool trees, and night,
And the sweet, tranquil Thames,
And moonshine, and the dew,
To thy rack'd heart and brain
Afford no balm ?

Dost thou to-night behold,
Here, through the moonlight on this English grass,
The unfriendly palace in the Thracian wild ?

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Dost thou again peruse
With hot cheeks and sear'd eyes
The too clear web, and thy dumb sister's shame?
Dost thou once more assay
Thy flight, and feel come over thee,
Poor fugitive, the feathery change
Once more, and once more seem to make resound
With love and hate, triumph and agony,
Lone Daulis, and the high Cephissian vale?
Listen, Eugenia—
How thick the bursts come crowding through the leaves!
Again—thou hearest?
Eternal passion!
Eternal pain!

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URANIA

I too have suffer'd ; yet I know
She is not cold, though she seems so.
She is not cold, she is not light ;
But our ignoble souls lack might.

She smiles and smiles, and will not sigh,
While we for hopeless passion die ;
Yet she could love, those eyes declare,
Were but men nobler than they are.

Eagerly once her gracious ken
Was turn'd upon the sons of men ;
But light the serious visage grew—
She look'd, and smiled, and saw them through.

Our petty souls, our strutting wits,
Our labour'd, puny passion-fits—
Ah, may she scorn them still, till we
Scorn them as bitterly as she !

Yet show her once, ye heavenly Powers,
One of some worthier race than ours !
One for whose sake she once might prove
How deeply she who scorns can love.

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His eyes be like the starry lights—
His voice like sounds of summer nights—
In all his lovely mien let pierce
The magic of the universe!

And she to him will reach her hand,
And gazing in his eyes will stand,
And know her friend, and weep for glee,
And cry: *Long, long I've look'd for thee.*

Then will she weep; with smiles, till then,
Coldly she mocks the sons of men.
Till then, her lovely eyes maintain
Their pure, unwavering, deep disdain.

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EUPHROSYNE

I MUST not say that thou wast true,
Yet let me say that thou wast fair ;
And they, that lovely face who view,
Why should they ask if truth be there ?

Truth—what is truth ? Two bleeding hearts,
Wounded by men, by fortune tried,
Outwearied with their lonely parts,
Vow to beat henceforth side by side.

The world to them was stern and drear,
Their lot was but to weep and moan.
Ah, let them keep their faith sincere,
For neither could subsist alone !

But souls whom some benignant breath
Hath charm'd at birth from gloom and care,
These ask no love, these plight no faith,
For they are happy as they are.

The world to them may homage make,
And garlands for their forehead weave ;
And what the world can give, they take—
But they bring more than they receive.

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They shine upon the world ! Their ears
To one demand alone are coy ;
They will not give us love and tears,
They bring us light and warmth and joy.

It was not love which heaved thy breast,
Fair child !—it was the bliss within.
Adieu ! and say that one, at least,
Was just to what he did not win.

Digitized by Google

CALAIS SANDS

A THOUSAND knights have rein'd their steeds
To watch this line of sand-hills run,
Along the never-silent Strait,
To Calais glittering in the sun ;

To look tow'rd Ardres' Golden Field
Across this wide aërial plain,
Which glows as if the Middle Age
Were gorgeous upon earth again.

Oh, that to share this famous scene,
I saw, upon the open sand,
Thy lovely presence at my side,
Thy shawl, thy look, thy smile, thy hand !

How exquisite thy voice would come,
My darling, on this lonely air !
How sweetly would the fresh sea-breeze
Shake loose some band of soft brown hair !

Yet now my glance but once hath roved
O'er Calais and its famous plain ;
To England's cliffs my gaze is turn'd,
On the blue strait mine eyes I strain.

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Thou comest! Yes! the vessel's cloud
Hangs dark upon the rolling sea.
Oh, that yon sea-bird's wings were mine,
To win one instant's glimpse of thee!

I must not spring to grasp thy hand,
To woo thy smile, to seek thine eye;
But I may stand far off, and gaze,
And watch thee pass unconscious by,

And spell thy looks, and guess thy thoughts,
Mixt with the idlers on the pier.—
Ah, might I always rest unseen,
So I might have thee always near!

To-morrow hurry through the fields
Of Flanders to the storied Rhine!
To-night those soft-fringed eyes shall close
Beneath one roof, my queen! with mine.

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FADED LEAVES

1. THE RIVER

STILL glides the stream, slow drops the boat
Under the rustling poplars' shade ;
Silent the swans beside us float—
None speaks, none heeds ; ah, turn thy head !

Let those arch eyes now softly shine,
That mocking mouth grow sweetly bland ;
Ah, let them rest, those eyes, on mine !
On mine let rest that lovely hand !

My pent-up tears oppress my brain,
My heart is swoln with love unsaid.
Ah, let me weep, and tell my pain,
And on thy shoulder rest my head !

Before I die—before the soul,
Which now is mine, must re-attain
Immunity from my control,
And wander round the world again ;

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Before this teased o'erlabour'd heart
For ever leaves its vain employ,
Dead to its deep habitual smart,
And dead to hopes of future joy.

2. TOO LATE

EACH on his own strict line we move,
And some find death ere they find love ;
So far apart their lives are thrown
From the twin soul which halves their own.

And sometimes, by still harder fate,
The lovers meet, but meet too late.
—Thy heart is mine !—*True, true ! ah, true!*
—Then, love, thy hand !—*Ah no ! adieu !*

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3. SEPARATION

STOP !—not to me, at this bitter departing,
Speak of the sure consolations of time !
Fresh be the wound, still-renew'd be its smarting,
So but thy image endure in its prime.

But, if the stedfast commandment of Nature
Wills that remembrance should always decay—
If the loved form and the deep-cherish'd feature
Must, when unseen, from the soul fade away—

Me let no half-effaced memories cumber !
Fled, fled at once, be all vestige of thee !
Deep be the darkness and still be the slumber—
Dead be the past and its phantoms to me !

Then, when we meet, and thy look strays toward me,
Scanning my face and the changes wrought there :
Who, let me say, *is this stranger regards me,*
With the grey eyes, and the lovely brown hair ?

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4. ON THE RHINE

VAIN is the effort to forget.
Some day I shall be cold, I know,
As is the eternal moonlit snow
Of the high Alps, to which I go—
But ah, not yet, not yet!

Vain is the agony of grief.
'Tis true, indeed, an iron knot
Ties straitly up from mine thy lot,
And were it snapt—thou lov'st me not!
But is despair relief?

Awhile let me with thought have done.
And as this brimm'd unwrinkled Rhine,
And that far purple mountain-line,
Lie sweetly in the look divine
Of the slow-sinking sun;

So let me lie, and, calm as they,
Let beam upon my inward view
Those eyes of deep, soft, lucent hue—
Eyes too expressive to be blue,
Too lovely to be grey.

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FADED LEAVES

Ah, Quiet, all things feel thy balm !
Those blue hills too, this river's flow,
Were restless once, but long ago.
Tamed is their turbulent youthful glow ;
Their joy is in their calm.

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5. LONGING

Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again !
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.

Come, as thou cam'st a thousand times,
A messenger from radiant climes,
And smile on thy new world, and be
As kind to others as to me !

Or, as thou never cam'st in sooth,
Come now, and let me dream it truth ;
And part my hair, and kiss my brow,
And say : *My love ! why sufferest thou ?*

Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again !
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.

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DESPONDENCY

The thoughts that rain their steady glow
Like stars on life's cold sea,
Which others know, or say they know—
They never shone for me.

Thoughts light, like gleams, my spirit's sky,
But they will not remain.
They light me once, they hurry by ;
And never come again.

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5. LONGING

Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again!
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.

Come, as thou can'st a thousand times,
A messenger from radiant climes,
And smile on thy new world, and be
As kind to others as to me!

Or, as thou never can'st in sooth,
Come now, and let me dream it truth
And part my hair, and kiss my brow,
And say: *My love! why sufferest thou*

Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again!
For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day.

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SELF-DECEPTION

SAY, what blinds us, that we claim the glory
Of possessing powers not our share?
—Since man woke on earth, he knows his story,
But, before we woke on earth, we were.

Long, long since, undower'd yet, our spirit
Roam'd, ere birth, the treasuries of God;
Saw the gifts, the powers it might inherit,
Ask'd an outfit for its earthly road.

Then, as now, this tremulous, eager being
Strain'd and long'd and grasp'd each gift it saw;
Then, as now, a Power beyond our seeing
Staved us back, and gave our choice the law.

Ah, whose hand that day through Heaven guided
Man's new spirit, since it was not we?
Ah, who sway'd our choice, and who decided
What our gifts, and what our wants should be?

For, alas! he left us each retaining
Shreds of gifts which he refused in full.
Still these waste us with their hopeless straining,
Still the attempt to use them proves them null.

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SELF-DECEPTION

And on earth we wander, groping, reeling ;
Powers stir in us, stir and disappear.
Ah ! and he, who placed our master-feeling
Fail'd to place that master-feeling clear.

We but dream we have our wish'd-for powers,
Ends we seek we never shall attain.
Ah ! *some* power exists there, which is ours ?
Some end is there, we indeed may gain ?

Digitized by Google

DOVER BEACH

The sea is calm to-night.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits ;—on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone ; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air !
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen ! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægæan, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery ; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

Digitized by Google

DOVER BEACH

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another ! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain ;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Digitized by Google

GROWING OLD

WHAT is it to grow old?
Is it to lose the glory of the form,
The lustre of the eye?
Is it for beauty to forgo her wreath?
—Yes, but not this alone.

Is it to feel our strength—
Not our bloom only, but our strength—decay?
Is it to feel each limb
Grow stiffer, every function less exact,
Each nerve more loosely strung?

Yes, this, and more; but not,
Ah, 'tis not what in youth we dream'd 'twould be!
'Tis not to have our life
Mellow'd and soften'd as with sunset-glow,
A golden day's decline.

'Tis not to see the world
As from a height, with rapt prophetic eyes,
And heart profoundly stirr'd;
And weep, and feel the fulness of the past,
The years that are no more.

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GROWING OLD

It is to spend long days
And not once feel that we were ever young ;
It is to add, immured
In the hot prison of the present, month
To month with weary pain.

It is to suffer this,
And feel but half, and feebly, what we feel.
Deep in our hidden heart
Festers the dull remembrance of a change,
But no emotion—none.

It is—last stage of all—
When we are frozen up within, and quite
The phantom of ourselves,
To hear the world applaud the hollow ghost
Which blamed the living man.

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THE PROGRESS OF POESY

A VARIATION

YOUTH rambles on life's arid mount,
And strikes the rock, and finds the vein,
And brings the water from the fount,
The fount which shall not flow again.

The man mature with labour chops
For the bright stream a channel grand,
And sees not that the sacred drops
Ran off and vanish'd out of hand.

And then the old man totters nigh,
And feebly rakes among the stones.
The mount is mute, the channel dry ;
And down he lays his weary bones.

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NEW ROME

LINES WRITTEN FOR MISS STORY'S ALBUM

THE armless Vatican Cupid
Hangs down his beautiful head;
For the priests have got him in prison,
And Psyche long has been dead.

But see, his shaven oppressors
Begin to quake and disband!
And *The Times*, that bright Apollo,
Proclaims salvation at hand.

'And what,' cries Cupid, 'will save us?'
'Says Apollo: '*Modernise Rome!*
What inns! Your streets, too, how narrow!
Too much of palace and dome!

'O learn of London, whose paupers
Are not pushed out by the swells!
Wide streets with fine double trottoirs;
And then—the London hotels!'

The armless Vatican Cupid
Hangs down his head as before.
Through centuries past it has hung so,
And will through centuries more.

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PIS-ALLER

'MAN is blind because of sin,
Revelation makes him sure;
Without that, who looks within,
Looks in vain, for all 's obscure.'

Nay, look closer into man!
Tell me, can you find indeed
Nothing sure, no moral plan
Clear prescribed, without your creed?

'No, I nothing can perceive!
Without that, all 's dark for men.
That, or nothing, I believe.'—
For God's sake, believe it then!

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THE LAST WORD

Creep into thy narrow bed,
Creep, and let no more be said!
Vain thy onset! all stands fast.
Thou thyself must break at last.

Let the long contention cease!
Geese are swans, and swans are geese.
Let them have it how they will!
Thou art tired; best be still.

They out-talk'd thee, hiss'd thee, tore thee!
Better men fared thus before thee;
Fired their ringing shot and pass'd,
Hotly charged—and sank at last.

Charge once more, then, and be dumb!
Let the victors, when they come,
When the forts of folly fall,
Find thy body by the wall!

Digitized by Google

THE LORD'S MESSENGERS

Thus saith the Lord to his own :—
'See ye the trouble below?
Warfare of man from his birth!
Too long let we them groan;
Haste, arise ye, and go,
Carry my peace upon earth!'

Gladly they rise at his call,
Gladly obey his command,
Gladly descend to the plain.
—Ah! How few of them all,
Those willing servants, shall stand
In the Master's presence again!

Some in the tumult are lost;
Baffled, bewilder'd, they stray.
Some, as prisoners, draw breath.
Some, unconquer'd, are cross'd
(Not yet half through the day)
By a pitiless arrow of Death.

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THE LORD'S MESSENGERS

Hardly, hardly shall one
  Come, with countenance bright,
    At the close of day, from the plain ;
His Master's errand well done,
  Safe through the smoke of the fight,
    Back to his Master again.

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A NAMELESS EPITAPH

Ask not my name, O friend!
That Being only, which hath known each man
From the beginning, can
Remember each unto the end.

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BACCHANALIA ;

OR,

THE NEW AGE

I

The evening comes, the fields are still.
The tinkle of the thirsty rill,
Unheard all day, ascends again ;
Deserted is the half-mown plain,
Silent the swaths ! the ringing wain,
The mower's cry, the dog's alarms,
All housed within the sleeping farms !
The business of the day is done,
The last-left haymaker is gone.
And from the thyme upon the height,
And from the elder-blossom white
And pale dog-roses in the hedge,
And from the mint-plant in the sedge,
In puffs of balm the night-air blows
The perfume which the day forgoes.
And on the pure horizon far,
See, pulsing with the first-born star,

Digitized by Google

The liquid sky above the hill !
The evening comes, the fields are still.

Loitering and leaping,
With saunter, with bounds—
Flickering and circling
In files and in rounds—
Gaily their pine-staff green
Tossing in air,
Loose o'er their shoulders white
Showering their hair—
See ! the wild Mænads
Break from the wood,
Youth and Iacchus
Maddening their blood.
See ! through the quiet land
Rioting they pass—
Fling the fresh heaps about,
Trample the grass.
Tear from the rifled hedge
Garlands, their prize ;
Fill with their sports the field,
Fill with their cries.

Shepherd, what ails thee, then ?
Shepherd, why mute ?
Forth with thy joyous song !
Forth with thy flute !
Tempts not the revel blithe ?
Lure not their cries ?

Digitized by Google

Glow not their shoulders smooth ?
Melt not their eyes ?
Is not, on cheeks like those,
Lovely the flush ?
—Ah, so the quiet was !
So was the hush !

II

The epoch ends, the world is still.
The age has talk'd and work'd its fill—
The famous orators have shone,
The famous poets sung and gone,
The famous men of war have fought,
The famous speculators thought,
The famous players, sculptors, wrought,
The famous painters fill'd their wall,
The famous critics judged it all.
The combatants are parted now—
Uphung the spear, unbent the bow,
The puissant crown'd, the weak laid low.
And in the after-silence sweet,
Now strifes are hush'd, our ears doth meet,
Ascending pure, the bell-like fame
Of this or that down-trodden name
Delicate spirits, push'd away
In the hot press of the noon-day.
And o'er the plain, where the dead age
Did its now silent warfare wage—

Digitized by Google

O'er that wide plain, now wrapt in gloom,
Where many a splendour finds its tomb,
Many spent fames and fallen mights—
The one or two immortal lights
Rise slowly up into the sky
To shine there everlastingly,
Like stars over the bounding hill.
The epoch ends, the world is still.

Thundering and bursting
In torrents, in waves—
Carolling and shouting
Over tombs, amid graves—
See! on the cumber'd plain
Clearing a stage,
Scattering the past about,
Comes the new age.
Bards make new poems,
Thinkers new schools,
Statesmen new systems,
Critics new rules.
All things begin again;
Life is their prize;
Earth with their deeds they fill,
Fill with their cries.

Poet, what ails thee, then?
Say, why so mute?
Forth with thy praising voice!
Forth with thy flute!

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BACCHANALIA; OR, THE NEW AGE

Loiterer! why sittest thou
Sunk in thy dream?
Tempts not the bright new age?
Shines not its stream?
Look, ah, what genius,
Art, science, wit!
Soldiers like Cæsar,
Statesmen like Pitt!
Sculptors like Phidias,
Raphaels in shoals,
Poets like Shakespeare—
Beautiful souls!
See, on their glowing cheeks
Heavenly the flush!
—Ah, so the silence was!
So was the hush!

The world but feels the present's spell,
The poet feels the past as well;
Whatever men have done, might do,
Whatever thought, might think it too.

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EPILOGUE TO LESSING'S LAOCOÖN

One morn as through Hyde Park we walk'd,
My friend and I, by chance we talk'd
Of Lessing's famed Laocoön;
And after we awhile had gone
In Lessing's track, and tried to see
What painting is, what poetry—
Diverging to another thought,
'Ah,' cries my friend, 'but who hath taught
Why music and the other arts
Oftener perform aright their parts
Than poetry? why she, than they,
Fewer fine successes can display?

'For 'tis so, surely! Even in Greece,
Where best the poet framed his piece,
Even in that Phœbus-guarded ground
Pausanias on his travels found
Good poems, if he look'd, more rare
(Though many) than good statues were—
For these, in truth, were everywhere.
Of bards full many a stroke divine
In Dante's, Petrarch's, Tasso's line,
The land of Ariosto show'd;

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And yet, e'en there, the canvas glow'd
With triumphs, a yet ampler brood,
Of Raphael and his brotherhood.
And nobly perfect, in our day
Of haste, half-work, and disarray,
Profound yet touching, sweet yet strong,
Hath risen Goethe's, Wordsworth's song;
Yet even I (and none will bow
Deeper to these) must needs allow,
They yield us not, to soothe our pains,
Such multitude of heavenly strains
As from the kings of sound are blown,
Mozart, Beethoven, Mendelssohn.'

While thus my friend discoursed, we pass
Out of the path, and take the grass.
The grass had still the green of May,
And still the unblacken'd elms were gay;
The kine were resting in the shade,
The flies a summer-murmur made.
Bright was the morn and south the air;
The soft-couch'd cattle were as fair
As those which pastured by the sea,
That old-world morn, in Sicily,
When on the beach the Cyclops lay,
And Galatea from the bay
Mock'd her poor lovelorn giant's lay.
'Behold,' I said, 'the painter's sphere!
The limits of his art appear.
The passing group, the summer-morn,
The grass, the elms, that blossom'd thorn—

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Those cattle couch'd, or, as they rise,
Their shining flanks, their liquid eyes—
These, or much greater things, but caught
Like these, and in one aspect brought!
In outward semblance he must give
A moment's life of things that live;
Then let him choose his moment well,
With power divine its story tell.'

Still we walk'd on, in thoughtful mood,
And now upon the bridge we stood.
Full of sweet breathings was the air,
Of sudden stirs and pauses fair.
Down o'er the stately bridge the breeze
Came rustling from the garden-trees
And on the sparkling waters play'd;
Light-plashing waves an answer made,
And mimic boats their haven near'd.
Beyond, the Abbey-towers appear'd,
By mist and chimneys unconfined,
Free to the sweep of light and wind;
While through their earth-moor'd nave below
Another breath of wind doth blow,
Sound as of wandering breeze—but sound
In laws by human artists bound.
'The world of music!' I exclaim'd:—
'This breeze that rustles by, that famed
Abbey recall it! what a sphere,
Large and profound, hath genius here!
The inspired musician what a range,
What power of passion, wealth of change!

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EPILOGUE TO LESSING'S LAOCOÖN

Some source of feeling he must choose
And its lock'd fount of beauty use,
And through the stream of music tell
Its else unutterable spell;
To choose it rightly is his part,
And press into its inmost heart.

'*Miserere, Domine!*
The words are utter'd, and they flee.
Deep is their penitential moan,
Mighty their pathos, but 'tis gone.
They have declared the spirit's sore
Sore load, and words can do no more.
Beethoven takes them then—those two
Poor, bounded words—and makes them new;
Infinite makes them, makes them young;
Transplants them to another tongue,
Where they can now, without constraint,
Pour all the soul of their complaint,
And roll adown a channel large
The wealth divine they have in charge.
Page after page of music turn,
And still they live and still they burn,
Eternal, passion-fraught, and free—
Miserere, Domine!'

Onward we moved, and reach'd the Ride
Where gaily flows the human tide.
Afar, in rest the cattle lay;
We heard, afar, faint music play;
But agitated, brisk, and near,

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Men, with their stream of life, were here.
Some hang upon the rails, and some
On foot behind them go and come.
This through the Ride upon his steed
Goes slowly by, and this at speed.
The young, the happy, and the fair,
The old, the sad, the worn, were there ;
Some vacant, and some musing went,
And some in talk and merriment.
Nods, smiles, and greetings, and farewells !
And now and then, perhaps, there swells
A sigh, a tear—but in the throng
All changes fast, and hies along.
Hies, ah, from whence, what native ground ?
And to what goal, what ending, bound ?
'Behold, at last the poet's sphere !
But who,' I said, 'suffices here ?

'For, ah ! so much he has to do ;
Be painter and musician too !
The aspect of the moment show,
The feeling of the moment know !
The aspect not, I grant, express
Clear as the painter's art can dress ;
The feeling not, I grant, explore
So deep as the musician's lore—
But clear as words can make revealing,
And deep as words can follow feeling.
But, ah ! then comes his sorest spell
Of toil—he must life's *movement* tell !
The thread which binds it all in one,

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EPILOGUE TO LESSING'S LAOCOÖN

And not its separate parts alone.
The *movement* he must tell of life,
Its pain and pleasure, rest and strife ;
His eye must travel down, at full,
The long, unpausing spectacle ;
With faithful unrelaxing force
Attend it from its primal source,
From change to change and year to year
Attend it of its mid career,
Attend it to the last repose
And solemn silence of its close.

'The cattle rising from the grass
His thought must follow where they pass ;
The penitent with anguish bow'd
His thought must follow through the crowd.
Yes ! all this eddying, motley throng
That sparkles in the sun along,
Girl, statesman, merchant, soldier bold,
Master and servant, young and old,
Grave, gay, child, parent, husband, wife
He follows home, and lives their life.

'And many, many are the souls
Life's movement fascinates, controls ;
It draws them on, they cannot save
Their feet from its alluring wave ;
They cannot leave it, they must go
With its unconquerable flow.
But ah ! how few, of all that try
This mighty march, do aught but die !

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For ill-endow'd for such a way,
Ill-stored in strength, in wits, are they.
They faint, they stagger to and fro,
And wandering from the stream they go ;
In pain, in terror, in distress,
They see, all round, a wilderness.
Sometimes a momentary gleam
They catch of the mysterious stream ;
Sometimes, a second's space, their ear
The murmur of its waves doth hear.
That transient glimpse in song they say,
But not as painter can pourtray—
That transient sound in song they tell,
But not, as the musician, well.
And when at last their snatches cease,
And they are silent and at peace,
The stream of life's majestic whole
Hath ne'er been mirror'd on their soul.

'Only a few the life-stream's shore
With safe unwandering feet explore ;
Untired its movement bright attend,
Follow its windings to the end.
Then from its brimming waves their eye
Drinks up delighted ecstasy,
And its deep-toned, melodious voice
For ever makes their ear rejoice.
They speak ! the happiness divine
They feel, runs o'er in every line ;
Its spell is round them like a shower—
It gives them pathos, gives them power.

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EPILOGUE TO LESSING'S LAOCOÖN

No painter yet hath such a way,
Nor no musician made, as they,
And gather'd on immortal knolls
Such lovely flowers for cheering souls.
Beethoven, Raphael, cannot reach
The charm which Homer, Shakespeare, teach.
To these, to these, their thankful race
Gives, then, the first, the fairest place ;
And brightest is their glory's sheen,
For greatest hath their labour been.'

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PERSISTENCY OF POETRY

THOUGH the Muse be gone away,
Though she move not earth to-day,
Souls, erewhile who caught her word,
Ah ! still harp on what they heard.

A CAUTION TO POETS

WHAT poets feel not, when they make,
A pleasure in creating,
The world, in *its* turn, will not take
Pleasure in contemplating.

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THE YOUTH OF NATURE

RAISED are the dripping oars,
Silent the boat ! the lake,
Lovely and soft as a dream,
Swims in the sheen of the moon.
The mountains stand at its head
Clear in the pure June-night,
But the valleys are flooded with haze.
Rydal and Fairfield are there ;
In the shadow Wordsworth lies dead.
So it is, so it will be for aye.
Nature is fresh as of old,
Is lovely ; a mortal is dead.

The spots which recall him survive,
For he lent a new life to these hills.
The Pillar still broods o'er the fields
Which border Ennerdale Lake,
And Egremont sleeps by the sea.
The gleam of The Evening Star
Twinkles on Grasmere no more,
But ruin'd and solemn and grey
The sheepfold of Michael survives ;

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And, far to the south, the heath
Still blows in the Quantock coombs,
By the favourite waters of Ruth.
These survive !—yet not without pain,
Pain and dejection to-night,
Can I feel that their poet is gone.

He grew old in an age he condemn'd.
He look'd on the rushing decay
Of the times which had shelter'd his youth ;
Felt the dissolving throes
Of a social order he loved ;
Outlived his brethren, his peers ;
And, like the Theban seer,
Died in his enemies' day.

Cold bubbled the spring of Tilphusa,
Copais lay bright in the moon,
Helicon glass'd in the lake
Its firs, and afar rose the peaks
Of Parnassus, snowily clear ;
Thebes was behind him in flames,
And the clang of arms in his ear,
When his awe-struck captors led
The Theban seer to the spring.
Tiresias drank and died.
Nor did reviving Thebes
See such a prophet again.

Well may we mourn, when the head
Of a sacred poet lies low

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In an age which can rear them no more!
The complaining millions of men
Darken in labour and pain;
But he was a priest to us all
Of the wonder and bloom of the world,
Which we saw with his eyes, and were glad.
He is dead, and the fruit-bearing day
Of his race is past on the earth;
And darkness returns to our eyes.

For, oh! is it you, is it you,
Moonlight, and shadow, and lake,
And mountains, that fill us with joy,
Or the poet who sings you so well?
Is it you, O beauty, O grace,
O charm, O romance, that we feel,
Or the voice which reveals what you are?
Are ye, like daylight and sun,
Shared and rejoiced in by all?
Or are ye immersed in the mass
Of matter, and hard to extract,
Or sunk at the core of the world
Too deep for the most to discern?
Like stars in the deep of the sky,
Which arise on the glass of the sage,
But are lost when their watcher is gone.

'They are here'—I heard, as men heard
In Mysian Ida the voice
Of the Mighty Mother, or Crete,
The murmur of Nature reply—

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'Loveliness, magic, and grace,
They are here! they are set in the world,
They abide; and the finest of souls
Hath not been thrill'd by them all,
Nor the dullest been dead to them quite.
The poet who sings them may die,
But they are immortal and live,
For they are the life of the world.
Will ye not learn it, and know,
When ye mourn that a poet is dead,
That the singer was less than his themes,
Life, and emotion, and I?

'More than the singer are these.
Weak is the tremor of pain
That thrills in his mournfullest chord
To that which once ran through his soul.
Cold the elation of joy
In his gladdest, airiest song,
To that which of old in his youth
Fill'd him and made him divine.
Hardly his voice at its best
Gives us a sense of the awe,
The vastness, the grandeur, the gloom
Of the unlit gulph of himself.

'Ye know not yourselves; and your bards—
The clearest, the best, who have read
Most in themselves—have beheld
Less than they left unreveal'd.
Ye express not yourselves;—can you make

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THE YOUTH OF NATURE

With marble, with colour, with word,
What charm'd you in others re-live?
Can thy pencil, O artist! restore
The figure, the bloom of thy love,
As she was in her morning of spring?
Canst thou paint the ineffable smile
Of her eyes as they rested on thine?
Can the image of life have the glow,
The motion of life itself?

'Yourselves and your fellows ye know not; and me,
The mateless, the one, will ye know?
Will ye scan me, and read me, and tell
Of the thoughts that ferment in my breast,
My longing, my sadness, my joy?
Will ye claim for your great ones the gift
To have render'd the gleam of my skies,
To have echoed the moan of my seas,
Utter'd the voice of my hills?
When your great ones depart, will ye say:
All things have suffer'd a loss,
Nature is hid in their grave?

'Race after race, man after man,
Have thought that my secret was theirs,
Have dream'd that I lived but for them,
That they were my glory and joy.
—They are dust, they are changed, they are gone!
I remain.'

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THE YOUTH OF MAN

We, O Nature, depart,
Thou survivest us! this,
This, I know, is the law.
Yes! but more than this,
Thou who seest us die
Seest us change while we live;
Seest our dreams, one by one,
Seest our errors depart;
Watchest us, Nature! throughout,
Mild and inscrutably calm.

Well for us that we change!
Well for us that the power
Which in our morning-prime
Saw the mistakes of our youth,
Sweet, and forgiving, and good,
Sees the contrition of age!

Behold, O Nature, this pair!
See them to-night where they stand,
Not with the halo of youth
Crowning their brows with its light,

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THE YOUTH OF MAN

Not with the sunshine of hope,
Not with the rapture of spring,
Which they had of old, when they stood
Years ago at my side
In this self-same garden, and said :
'We are young, and the world is ours ;
Man, man is the king of the world !
Fools that these mystics are
Who prate of Nature ! for she
Hath neither beauty, nor warmth,
Nor life, nor emotion, nor power.
But man has a thousand gifts,
And the generous dreamer invests
The senseless world with them all.
Nature is nothing ; her charm
Lives in our eyes which can paint,
Lives in our hearts which can feel.'

Thou, O Nature, wast mute,
Mute as of old ! days flew,
Days and years ; and Time
With the ceaseless stroke of his wings
Brush'd off the bloom from their soul.
Clouded and dim grew their eye,
Languid their heart—for youth
Quicken'd its pulses no more.
Slowly, within the walls
Of an ever-narrowing world,
They droop'd, they grew blind, they grew old.
Thee and their youth in thee,
Nature ! they saw no more.

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Murmur of living,
Stir of existence,
Soul of the world !
Make, oh, make yourselves felt
To the dying spirit of youth !
Come, like the breath of the spring !
Leave not a human soul
To grow old in darkness and pain !
Only the living can feel you,
But leave us not while we live !

Here they stand to-night—
Here, where this grey balustrade
Crowns the still valley ; behind
Is the castled house, with its woods,
Which shelter'd their childhood—the sun
On its ivied windows ; a scent
From the grey-wall'd gardens, a breath
Of the fragrant stock and the pink,
Perfumes the evening air.
Their children play on the lawns.
They stand and listen ; they hear
The children's shouts, and at times,
Faintly, the bark of a dog
From a distant farm in the hills.
Nothing besides ! in front
The wide, wide valley outspreads
To the dim horizon, reposed
In the twilight, and bathed in dew,
Corn-field and hamlet and copse
Darkening fast ; but a light,

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THE YOUTH OF MAN

Far off, a glory of day,
Still plays on the city spires;
And there in the dusk by the walls,
With the grey mist marking its course
Through the silent, flowery land,
On, to the plains, to the sea,
Floats the imperial stream.

Well I know what they feel!
They gaze, and the evening wind
Plays on their faces; they gaze—
Airs from the Eden of youth
Awake and stir in their soul;
The past returns—they feel
What they are, alas! what they were.
They, not Nature, are changed.
Well I know what they feel!

Hush, for tears
Begin to steal to their eyes!
Hush, for fruit
Grows from such sorrow as theirs!

And they remember,
With piercing, untold anguish,
The proud boasting of their youth
And they feel how Nature was fair.
And the mists of delusion,
And the scales of habit,
Fall away from their eyes;
And they see, for a moment,

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Stretching out, like the desert
In its weary, unprofitable length,
Their faded, ignoble lives.

While the locks are yet brown on thy head,
While the soul still looks through thine eyes,
While the heart still pours
The mantling blood to thy cheek,
Sink, O youth, in thy soul!
Yearn to the greatness of Nature;
Rally the good in the depths of thyself!

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PALLADIUM

Set where the upper streams of Simois flow
Was the Palladium, high 'mid rock and wood;
And Hector was in Ilium, far below,
And fought, and saw it not—but there it stood!

It stood, and sun and moonshine rain'd their light
On the pure columns of its glen-built hall.
Backward and forward roll'd the waves of fight
Round Troy—but while this stood, Troy could not fall.

So, in its lovely moonlight, lives the soul.
Mountains surround it, and sweet virgin air;
Cold plashing, past it, crystal waters roll;
We visit it by moments, ah, too rare!

We shall renew the battle in the plain
To-morrow;—red with blood will Xanthus be;
Hector and Ajax will be there again,
Helen will come upon the wall to see.

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Then we shall rust in shade, or shine in strife,
And fluctuate 'twixt blind hopes and blind
despairs,
And fancy that we put forth all our life,
And never know how with the soul it fares.

Still doth the soul, from its lone fastness high,
Upon our life a ruling effluence send.
And when it fails, fight as we will, we die ;
And while it lasts, we cannot wholly end.

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PROGRESS

THE Master stood upon the mount, and taught.
He saw a fire in his disciples' eyes;
'The old law,' they cried, 'is wholly come to
nought,
Behold the new world rise!'

'Was it,' the Lord then said, 'with scorn ye saw
The old law observed by Scribes and Pharisees?
I say unto you, see *ye* keep that law
More faithfully than these!

'Too hasty heads for ordering worlds, alas!
Think not that I to annul the law have will'd;
No jot, no tittle from the law shall pass,
Till all have been fulfill'd.'

So Christ said eighteen hundred years ago.
And what then shall be said to those to-day,
Who cry aloud to lay the old world low
To clear the new world's way?

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'Religious fervours! ardour misapplied!
Hence, hence,' they cry, 'ye do but keep man
blind!
But keep him self-immersed, preoccupied,
And lame the active mind!'

Ah! from the old world let some one answer
give:
'Scorn ye this world, their tears, their inward
cares?
I say unto you, see that *your* souls live
A deeper life than theirs!

'Say ye: "The spirit of man has found new
roads,
And we must leave the old faiths, and walk
therein"?—
Leave then the Cross as ye have left carved gods,
But guard the fire within!

'Bright else and fast the stream of life may roll,
And no man may the other's hurt behold;
Yet each will have one anguish—his own soul
Which perishes of cold.'

Here let that voice make end; then, let a strain,
From a far lonelier distance, like the wind
Be heard, floating through heaven, and fill again
These men's profoundest mind:

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PROGRESS

'Children of men! the unseen Power, whose eye
For ever doth accompany mankind,
Hath look'd on no religion scornfully
That men did ever find.

'Which has not taught weak wills how much they can?
Which has not fall'n on the dry heart like rain?
Which has not cried to sunk, self-weary man:
Thou must be born again!

'Children of men! not that your age excel
In pride of life the ages of your sires,
But that ye think clear, feel deep, bear fruit well,
The Friend of man desires.'

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REVOLUTIONS

Before man parted for this earthly strand,
While yet upon the verge of heaven he stood,
God put a heap of letters in his hand,
And bade him make with them what word he could.

And man has turn'd them many times; made Greece,
Rome, England, France;—yes, nor in vain essay'd
Way after way, changes that never cease!
The letters have combined, something was made.

But ah! an inextinguishable sense
Haunts him that he has not made what he should;
That he has still, though old, to recommence,
Since he has not yet found the word God would.

And empire after empire, at their height
Of sway, have felt this boding sense come on;
Have felt their huge frames not constructed right,
And droop'd, and slowly died upon their throne.

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REVOLUTIONS

One day, thou say'st, there will at last appear
The word, the order, which God meant should be.
—Ah ! we shall know *that* well when it comes near ;
The band will quit man's heart, he will breathe free.

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SELF-DEPENDENCE

WEARY of myself, and sick of asking
What I am, and what I ought to be,
At this vessel's prow I stand, which bears me
Forwards, forwards, o'er the starlit sea.

And a look of passionate desire
O'er the sea and to the stars I send:
'Ye who from my childhood up have calm'd me,
Calm me, ah, compose me to the end!

'Ah, once more,' I cried, 'ye stars, ye waters,
On my heart your mighty charm renew;
Still, still let me, as I gaze upon you,
Feel my soul becoming vast like you!'

From the intense, clear, star-sown vault of heaven,
Over the lit sea's unquiet way,
In the rustling night-air came the answer:
'Wouldst thou *be* as these are? *Live* as they.

'Unaffrighted by the silence round them,
Undistracted by the sights they see,
These demand not that the things without them
Yield them love, amusement, sympathy.

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SELF-DEPENDENCE

'And with joy the stars perform their shining,
And the sea its long moon-silver'd roll;
For self-poised they live, nor pine with noting
All the fever of some differing soul.

'Bounded by themselves, and unregardful
In what state God's other works may be,
In their own tasks all their powers pouring,
These attain the mighty life you see.'

O air-born voice! long since, severely clear,
A cry like thine in mine own heart I hear:
'Resolve to be thyself; and know that he,
Who finds himself, loses his misery!'

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MORALITY

We cannot kindle when we will
The fire which in the heart resides ;
The spirit bloweth and is still,
In mystery our soul abides.
But tasks in hours of insight will'd
Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd.

With aching hands and bleeding feet
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone ;
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day, and wish 'twere done.
Not till the hours of light return,
All we have built do we discern.

Then, when the clouds are off the soul,
When thou dost bask in Nature's eye,
Ask, how *she* view'd thy self-control,
Thy struggling, task'd morality—
Nature, whose free, light, cheerful air,
Oft made thee, in thy gloom, despair.

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MORALITY

And she, whose censure thou dost dread,
Whose eye thou wast afraid to seek,
See, on her face a glow is spread,
A strong emotion on her cheek!
'Ah, child!' she cries, 'that strife divine,
Whence was it, for it is not mine?

'There is no effort on *my* brow—
I do not strive, I do not weep;
I rush with the swift spheres and glow
In joy, and when I will, I sleep.
Yet that severe, that earnest air,
I saw, I felt it once—but where?

'I knew not yet the gauge of time,
Nor wore the manacles of space;
I felt it in some other clime,
I saw it in some other place.
'Twas when the heavenly house I trod,
And lay upon the breast of God.'

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A SUMMER NIGHT

In the deserted, moon-blanch'd street,
How lonely rings the echo of my feet!
Those windows, which I gaze at, frown,
Silent and white, unopening down,
Repellent as the world;—but see,
A break between the housetops shows
The moon! and, lost behind her, fading dim
Into the dewy dark obscurity
Down at the far horizon's rim,
Doth a whole tract of heaven disclose!

And to my mind the thought
Is on a sudden brought
Of a past night, and a far different scene.
Headlands stood out into the moonlit deep
As clearly as at noon;
The spring-tide's brimming flow
Heaved dazzlingly between;
Houses, with long white sweep,
Girdled the glistening bay;
Behind, through the soft air,
The blue haze-cradled mountains spread away.

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A SUMMER NIGHT

That night was far more fair—
But the same restless pacings to and fro,
And the same vainly throbbing heart was there,
And the same bright, calm moon.

And the calm moonlight seems to say :
Hast thou then still the old unquiet breast,
Which neither deadens into rest,
Nor ever feels the fiery glow
That whirls the spirit from itself away,
But fluctuates to and fro,
Never by passion quite possess'd
And never quite benumb'd by the world's sway ?—
And I, I know not if to pray
Still to be what I am, or yield and be
Like all the other men I see.

For most men in a brazen prison live,
Where, in the sun's hot eye,
With heads bent o'er their toil, they languidly
Their lives to some unmeaning taskwork give,
Dreaming of nought beyond their prison-wall.
And as, year after year,
Fresh products of their barren labour fall
From their tired hands, and rest
Never yet comes more near,
Gloom settles slowly down over their breast ;
And while they try to stem
The waves of mournful thought by which they
are prest,

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Death in their prison reaches them,
Unfreed, having seen nothing, still unblest.

And the rest, a few,
Escape their prison and depart
On the wide ocean of life anew.
There the freed prisoner, where'er his heart
Listeth, will sail;
Nor doth he know how there prevail,
Despotic on that sea,
Trade-winds which cross it from eternity.
Awhile he holds some false way, undebarr'd
By thwarting signs, and braves
The freshening wind and blackening waves.
And then the tempest strikes him; and between
The lightning-bursts is seen
Only a driving wreck,
And the pale master on his spar-strewn deck
With anguish'd face and flying hair
Grasping the rudder hard,
Still bent to make some port he knows not where,
Still standing for some false, impossible shore.
And sterner comes the roar
Of sea and wind, and through the deepening gloom
Fainter and fainter wreck and helmsman loom,
And he too disappears, and comes no more.

Is there no life, but these alone?
Madman or slave, must man be one?

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A SUMMER NIGHT

Plainness and clearness without shadow of stain !
Clearness divine !
Ye heavens, whose pure dark regions have no sign
Of languor, though so calm, and, though so great,
Are yet untroubled and unpassionate ;
Who, though so noble, share in the world's toil,
And, though so task'd, keep free from dust and soil !
I will not say that your mild deeps retain
A tinge, it may be, of their silent pain
Who have long'd deeply once, and long'd in vain—
But I will rather say that you remain
A world above man's head, to let him see
How boundless might his soul's horizons be,
How vast, yet of what clear transparency !
How it were good to abide there, and breathe free ;
How fair a lot to fill
Is left to each man still !

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THE BURIED LIFE

Light flows our war of mocking words, and yet,
Behold, with tears mine eyes are wet!
I feel a nameless sadness o'er me roll.
Yes, yes, we know that we can jest,
We know, we know that we can smile!
But there's a something in this breast,
To which thy light words bring no rest,
And thy gay smiles no anodyne.
Give me thy hand, and hush awhile,
And turn those limpid eyes on mine,
And let me read there, love! thy inmost soul.

Alas! is even love too weak
To unlock the heart, and let it speak?
Are even lovers powerless to reveal
To one another what indeed they feel?
I knew the mass of men conceal'd
Their thoughts, for fear that if reveal'd
They would by other men be met
With blank indifference, or with blame reproved;
I knew they lived and moved
Trick'd in disguises, alien to the rest

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THE BURIED LIFE

Of men, and alien to themselves—and yet
The same heart beats in every human breast !

But we, my love !—doth a like spell benumb
Our hearts, our voices ?—must we too be dumb ?

Ah ! well for us, if even we,
Even for a moment, can get free
Our heart, and have our lips unchain'd ;
For that which seals them hath been deep-
ordain'd !

Fate, which foresaw
How frivolous a baby man would be—
By what distractions he would be possess'd,
How he would pour himself in every strife,
And well-nigh change his own identity—
That it might keep from his capricious play
His genuine self, and force him to obey
Even in his own despite his being's law,
Bade through the deep recesses of our breast
The unregarded river of our life
Pursue with indiscernible flow its way ;
And that we should not see
The buried stream, and seem to be
Eddying at large in blind uncertainty,
Though driving on with it eternally.

But often, in the world's most crowded streets,
But often, in the din of strife,

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There rises an unspeakable desire
After the knowledge of our buried life ;
A thirst to spend our fire and restless force
In tracking out our true, original course ;
A longing to inquire
Into the mystery of this heart which beats
So wild, so deep in us—to know
Whence our lives come and where they go.
And many a man in his own breast then delves,
But deep enough, alas ! none ever mines.
And we have been on many thousand lines,
And we have shown, on each, spirit and power ;
But hardly have we, for one little hour,
Been on our own line, have we been ourselves—
Hardly had skill to utter one of all
The nameless feelings that course through our breast,
But they course on for ever unexpress'd.
And long we try in vain to speak and act
Our hidden self, and what we say and do
Is eloquent, is well—but 'tis not true !
And then we will no more be rack'd
With inward striving, and demand
Of all the thousand nothings of the hour
Their stupefying power ;
Ah yes, and they benumb us at our call !
Yet still, from time to time, vague and forlorn,
From the soul's subterranean depth upborne
As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
A melancholy into all our day.

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THE BURIED LIFE

Only—but this is rare—
When a belovéd hand is laid in ours,
When, jaded with the rush and glare
Of the interminable hours,
Our eyes can in another's eyes read clear,
When our world-deafen'd ear
Is by the tones of a loved voice caress'd—
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say, and what we would,
we know.
A man becomes aware of his life's flow,
And hears its winding murmur ; and he sees
The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.

And there arrives a lull in the hot race
Wherein he doth for ever chase
That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
An air of coolness plays upon his face,
And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
And then he thinks he knows
The hills where his life rose,
And the sea where it goes.

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LINES WRITTEN IN KENSINGTON GARDENS

In this lone, open glade I lie,
Screen'd by deep boughs on either hand;
And at its end, to stay the eye,
Those black-crown'd, red-boled pine-trees stand!

Birds here make song, each bird has his,
Across the girdling city's hum.
How green under the boughs it is!
How thick the tremulous sheep-cries come!

Sometimes a child will cross the glade
To take his nurse his broken toy;
Sometimes a thrush flit overhead
Deep in her unknown day's employ.

Here at my feet what wonders pass,
What endless, active life is here!
What blowing daisies, fragrant grass!
An air-stirr'd forest, fresh and clear.

Scarce fresher is the mountain-sod
Where the tired angler lies, stretch'd out,

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And, eased of basket and of rod,
Counts his day's spoil, the spotted trout.

In the huge world, which roars hard by,
Be others happy if they can !
But in my helpless cradle I
Was breathed on by the rural Pan.

I, on men's impious uproar hurl'd,
Think often, as I hear them rave,
That peace has left the upper world
And now keeps only in the grave.

Yet here is peace for ever new !
When I who watch them am away,
Still all things in this glade go through
The changes of their quiet day.

Then to their happy rest they pass !
The flowers upclose, the birds are fed,
The night comes down upon the grass,
The child sleeps warmly in his bed.

Calm soul of all things ! make it mine
To feel, amid the city's jar,
That there abides a peace of thine,
Man did not make, and cannot mar.

The will to neither strive nor cry,
The power to feel with others give !
Calm, calm me more ! nor let me die
Before I have begun to live.

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A WISH

I ASK not that my bed of death
From bands of greedy heirs be free ;
For these besiege the latest breath
Of fortune's favour'd sons, not me.

I ask not each kind soul to keep
Tearless, when of my death he hears.
Let those who will, if any, weep !
There are worse plagues on earth than tears.

I ask but that my death may find
The freedom to my life denied ;
Ask but the folly of mankind
Then, then at last, to quit my side.

Spare me the whispering, crowded room,
The friends who come, and gape, and go ;
The ceremonious air of gloom—
All, which makes death a hideous show !

Nor bring, to see me cease to live,
Some doctor full of phrase and fame,
To shake his sapient head, and give
The ill he cannot cure a name.

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A WISH

Nor fetch, to take the accustom'd toll
Of the poor sinner bound for death,
His brother-doctor of the soul,
To canvass with official breath

The future and its viewless things—
That undiscover'd mystery
Which one who feels death's winnowing wings
Must needs read clearer, sure, than he !

Bring none of these ; but let me be,
While all around in silence lies,
Moved to the window near, and see
Once more, before my dying eyes,

Bathed in the sacred dews of morn
The wide aerial landscape spread—
The world which was ere I was born,
The world which lasts when I am dead ;

Which never was the friend of *one*,
Nor promised love it could not give,
But lit for all its generous sun,
And lived itself, and made us live.

There let me gaze, till I become
In soul, with what I gaze on, wed !
To feel the universe my home ;
To have before my mind—instead

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Of the sick room, the mortal strife,
The turmoil for a little breath—
The pure eternal course of life,
Not human combatings with death !

Thus feeling, gazing, might I grow
Composed, refresh'd, ennobled, clear ;
Then willing let my spirit go
To work or wait elsewhere or here !

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THE FUTURE

A WANDERER is man from his birth.
He was born in a ship
On the breast of the river of Time;
Brimming with wonder and joy
He spreads out his arms to the light,
Rivets his gaze on the banks of the stream.

As what he sees is, so have his thoughts been.
Whether he wakes,
Where the snowy mountainous pass,
Echoing the screams of the eagles,
Hems in its gorges the bed
Of the new-born clear-flowing stream;
Whether he first sees light
Where the river in gleaming rings
Sluggishly winds through the plain;
Whether in sound of the swallowing sea—
As is the world on the banks,
So is the mind of the man.

Vainly does each, as he glides,
Fable and dream

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Of the lands which the river of Time
Had left ere he woke on its breast,
Or shall reach when his eyes have been closed.
Only the tract where he sails
He wots of; only the thoughts,
Raised by the objects he passes, are his.

Who can see the green earth any more
As she was by the sources of Time?
Who imagines her fields as they lay
In the sunshine, unworn by the plough?
Who thinks as they thought,
The tribes who then roam'd on her breast,
Her vigorous, primitive sons?

What girl
Now reads in her bosom as clear
As Rebekah read, when she sate
At eve by the palm-shaded well?
Who guards in her breast
As deep, as pellucid a spring
Of feeling, as tranquil, as sure?

What bard,
At the height of his vision, can deem
Of God, of the world, of the soul,
With a plainness as near,
As flashing as Moses felt
When he lay in the night by his flock
On the starlit Arabian waste?

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Can rise and obey
The beck of the Spirit like him?

This tract which the river of Time
Now flows through with us, is the plain.
Gone is the calm of its earlier shore.
Border'd by cities and hoarse
With a thousand cries is its stream.
And we on its breast, our minds
Are confused as the cries which we hear,
Changing and shot as the sights which we see.

And we say that repose has fled
For ever the course of the river of Time.
That cities will crowd to its edge
In a blacker, incessanter line;
That the din will be more on its banks,
Denser the trade on its stream,
Flatter the plain where it flows,
Fiercer the sun overhead.
That never will those on its breast
See an ennobling sight,
Drink of the feeling of quiet again.

But what was before us we know not,
And we know not what shall succeed.

Haply, the river of Time—
As it grows, as the towns on its marge

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Fling their wavering lights
On a wider, statelier stream—
May acquire, if not the calm
Of its early mountainous shore,
Yet a solemn peace of its own.

And the width of the waters, the hush
Of the grey expanse where he floats,
Freshening its current and spotted with foam
As it draws to the Ocean, may strike
Peace to the soul of the man on its breast—
As the pale waste widens around him,
As the banks fade dimmer away,
As the stars come out, and the night-wind
Brings up the stream
Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea.

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SONNETS

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AUSTERITY OF POETRY

THAT son of Italy who tried to blow,[4]
Ere Dante came, the trump of sacred song,
In his light youth amid a festal throng
Sate with his bride to see a public show.

Fair was the bride, and on her front did glow
Youth like a star; and what to youth belong—
Gay raiment, sparkling gauds, elation strong.
A prop gave way! crash fell a platform! lo,

'Mid struggling sufferers, hurt to death, she lay!
Shuddering, they drew her garments off—and found
A robe of sackcloth next the smooth, white skin.

Such, poets, is your bride, the Muse! young, gay,
Radiant, adorn'd outside; a hidden ground
Of thought and of austerity within.

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A PICTURE AT NEWSTEAD

WHAT made my heart, at Newstead, fullest swell?—
'Twas not the thought of Byron, of his cry
Stormily sweet, his Titan-agony;
It was the sight of that Lord Arundel

Who struck, in heat, his child he loved so well,
And his child's reason flicker'd, and did die.
Painted (he will'd it) in the gallery
They hang; the picture doth the story tell.

Behold the stern, mail'd father, staff in hand!
The little fair-hair'd son, with vacant gaze,
Where no more lights of sense or knowledge are!

Methinks the woe, which made that father stand
Baring his dumb remorse to future days,
Was woe than Byron's woe more tragic far.

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RACHEL

I

In Paris all look'd hot and like to fade.
Sere, in the garden of the Tuileries,
Sere with September, droop'd the chestnut-trees.
'Twas dawn; a brougham roll'd through the
streets and made

Halt at the white and silent colonnade
Of the French Theatre. Worn with disease,
Rachel, with eyes no gazing can appease,
Sate in the brougham and those blank walls
survey'd.

She follows the gay world, whose swarms have
fled
To Switzerland, to Baden, to the Rhine;
Why stops she by this empty play-house drear?

Ah, where the spirit its highest life hath led,
All spots, match'd with that spot, are less divine;
And Rachel's Switzerland, her Rhine, is here!

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RACHEL

II

Unto a lonely villa, in a dell
Above the fragrant warm Provençal shore,
The dying Rachel in a chair they bore
Up the steep pine-plumed paths of the Estrelle,

And laid her in a stately room, where fell
The shadow of a marble Muse of yore,
The rose-crown'd queen of legendary lore,
Polymnia, full on her death-bed.—'Twas well !

The fret and misery of our northern towns,
In this her life's last day, our poor, our pain,
Our jangle of false wits, our climate's frowns,

Do for this radiant Greek-soul'd artist cease ;
Sole object of her dying eyes remain
The beauty and the glorious art of Greece.

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RACHEL

III

Sprung from the blood of Israel's scatter'd race,
At a mean inn in German Aarau born,
To forms from antique Greece and Rome uptorn,
Trick'd out with a Parisian speech and face,

Imparting life renew'd, old classic grace ;
Then, soothing with thy Christian strain forlorn,
A-Kempis ! her departing soul outworn,
While by her bedside Hebrew rites have place—

Ah, not the radiant spirit of Greece alone
She had—one power, which made her breast its home !
In her, like us, there clash'd, contending powers,

Germany, France, Christ, Moses, Athens, Rome.
The strife, the mixture in her soul, are ours ;
Her genius and her glory are her own.

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WORLDLY PLACE

Even in a palace, life may be led well!
So spake the imperial sage, purest of men,
Marcus Aurelius. But the stifling den
Of common life, where, crowded up pell-mell,

Our freedom for a little bread we sell,
And drudge under some foolish master's ken
Who rates us if we peer outside our pen—
Match'd with a palace, is not this a hell?

Even in a palace! On his truth sincere,
Who spoke these words, no shadow ever came;
And when my ill-school'd spirit is aflame

Some nobler, ampler stage of life to win,
I'll stop, and say: 'There were no succour here!
The aids to noble life are all within.'

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EAST LONDON

'Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
In Spitalfields, look'd thrice dispirited.

I met a preacher there I knew, and said:
'Ill and o'erwork'd, how fare you in this scene?'—
'Bravely!' said he; 'for I of late have been
Much cheer'd with thoughts of Christ, *the living bread*.'

O human soul! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,

To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam—
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!
Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home.

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WEST LONDON

Crouch'd on the pavement, close by Belgrave Square,
A tramp I saw, ill, moody, and tongue-tied.
A babe was in her arms, and at her side
A girl; their clothes were rags, their feet were bare.

Some labouring men, whose work lay somewhere there,
Pass'd opposite; she touch'd her girl, who hied
Across, and begg'd, and came back satisfied.
The rich she had let pass with frozen stare.

Thought I: 'Above her state this spirit towers;
She will not ask of aliens, but of friends,
Of sharers in a common human fate.

'She turns from that cold succour, which attends
The unknown little from the unknowing great,
And points us to a better time than ours.'

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EAST AND WEST

In the bare midst of Anglesey they show
Two springs which close by one another play ;
And, 'Thirteen hundred years agone,' they say,
'Two saints met often where those waters flow.

'One came from Penmon westward, and a glow
Whiten'd his face from the sun's fronting ray ;
Eastward the other, from the dying day,
And he with unsunn'd face did always go.'

Seiriol the Bright, Kybi the Dark ! men said.
The seër from the East was then in light,
The seër from the West was then in shade.

Ah ! now 'tis changed. In conquering sunshine bright
The man of the bold West now comes array'd ;
He of the mystic East is touch'd with night.

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THE BETTER PART

Long fed on boundless hopes, O race of man,
How angrily thou spurn'st all simpler fare!
'Christ,' some one says, 'was human as we are;
No judge eyes us from Heaven, our sin to scan;

'We live no more, when we have done our span.'—
'Well, then, for Christ,' thou answerest, 'who can care?
From sin, which Heaven records not, why forbear?
Live we like brutes our life without a plan!'

So answerest thou; but why not rather say:
'Hath man no second life?—*Pitch this one high!*
Sits there no judge in Heaven, our sin to see?—

'*More strictly, then, the inward judge obey!*
Was Christ a man like us? *Ah! let us try*
If we then, too, can be such men as he!'

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THE DIVINITY

'Yes, write it in the rock,' Saint Bernard said,
'Grave it on brass with adamantine pen!
'Tis God himself becomes apparent, when
God's wisdom and God's goodness are display'd,

'For God of these his attributes is made.'—
Well spake the impetuous Saint, and bore of men
The suffrage captive; now, not one in ten
Recalls the obscure opposer he outweigh'd.[5]

God's wisdom and God's goodness!—Ay, but fools
Mis-define these till God knows them no more.
Wisdom and goodness, they are God!—what schools

Have yet so much as heard this simpler lore?
This no Saint preaches, and this no Church rules;
'Tis in the desert, now and heretofore.

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IMMORTALITY

Foil'd by our fellow-men, depress'd, outworn,
We leave the brutal world to take its way,
And, *Patience! in another life*, we say,
The world shall be thrust down, and we up-borne.

And will not, then, the immortal armies scorn
The world's poor, routed leavings? or will they,
Who fail'd under the heat of this life's day,
Support the fervours of the heavenly morn?

No, no! the energy of life may be
Kept on after the grave, but not begun;
And he who flagg'd not in the earthly strife,

From strength to strength advancing—only he,
His soul well-knit, and all his battles won,
Mounts, and that hardly, to eternal life.

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THE GOOD SHEPHERD WITH THE KID

He saves the sheep, the goats he doth not save.
So rang Tertullian's sentence, on the side
Of that unpitying Phrygian sect which cried :[6]
'Him can no fount of fresh forgiveness lave,

'Who sins, once wash'd by the baptismal wave.'—
So spake the fierce Tertullian. But she sigh'd,
The infant Church ! of love she felt the tide
Stream on her from her Lord's yet recent grave.

And then she smiled ; and in the Catacombs,
With eye suffused but heart inspired true,
On those walls subterranean, where she hid

Her head 'mid ignominy, death, and tombs,
She her Good Shepherd's hasty image drew—
And on his shoulders, not a lamb, a kid.

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MONICA'S LAST PRAYER[7]

'Ah could thy grave at home, at Carthage, be!'—
Care not for that, and lay me where I fall!
Everywhere heard will be the judgment-call;
But at God's altar, oh! remember me.

Thus Monica, and died in Italy.
Yet fervent had her longing been, through all
Her course, for home at last, and burial
With her own husband, by the Libyan sea.

Had been! but at the end, to her pure soul
All tie with all beside seem'd vain and cheap,
And union before God the only care.

Creeds pass, rites change, no altar standeth whole.
Yet we her memory, as she pray'd, will keep,
Keep by this: *Life in God, and union there!*

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DRAMATIC POEMS

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MEROPE

A TRAGEDY

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STORY OF THE DRAMA

APOLLODORUS says:—'Cresphontes had not reigned long in Messenia when he was murdered together with two of his sons. And Polyphontes reigned in his stead, he, too, being of the family of Hercules; and he had for his wife, against her will, Merope, the widow of the murdered king. But Merope had borne to Cresphontes a third son, called Æpytus; him she gave to her own father to bring up. He, when he came to man's estate, returned secretly to Messenia, and slew Polyphontes and the other murderers of his father.'

Hyginus says:—'Merope sent away and concealed her infant son. Polyphontes sought for him everywhere in vain. He, when he grew up, laid a plan to avenge the murder of his father and brothers. In pursuance of this plan he came to king Polyphontes and reported the death of the son of Cresphontes and Merope. The king ordered him to be hospitably entertained, intending to inquire further of him. He, being very tired, went to sleep, and an old man, who was the channel through whom the mother and son used to communicate, arrives at this moment in tears, bringing word to Merope that her son had disappeared from his protector's house, and was slain. Merope, believing that the sleeping stranger is the murderer of her son, comes into the guest-chamber with an axe, not knowing that he whom she would slay was her son; the old man recognised him, and withheld Merope from slaying him. The king, Polyphontes, rejoicing at the supposed death of Æpytus, celebrated a sacrifice; his guest, pretending to strike the sacrificial victim, slew the king, and so got back his father's kingdom.'

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STORY OF THE DRAMA

The events on which the action of the drama turns belong to the period of transition from the heroic and fabulous to the human and historic age of Greece. The doings of the hero Hercules, the ancestor of the Messenian Æpytus, belong to fable; but the invasion of Peloponnesus by the Dorians under chiefs claiming to be descended from Hercules, and their settlement in Argos, Lacedæmon, and Messenia, belong to history. Æpytus is descended on the father's side from Hercules, Perseus, and the kings of Argos; on the mother's side from Pelasgus, and the aboriginal kings of Arcadia. Callisto, the daughter of the wicked Lycaon, and the mother, by Zeus, of Arcas, from whom the Arcadians took their name, was the grand-daughter of Pelasgus. The birth of Arcas brought upon Callisto the anger of the virgin-goddess Artemis, whose service she followed: she was changed into a she-bear, and in this form was chased by her own son, grown to manhood. Zeus interposed, and the mother and son were removed from the earth, and placed among the stars. Callisto became the famous constellation of the Great Bear; her son became Arcturus, Arctophylax, or Boötes. From this son of Callisto were descended Cypselus, the maternal grandfather of Æpytus, and the children of Cypselus, Laias and Merope.

The story of the life of Hercules, the paternal ancestor of Æpytus, is so well known that there is no need to record it. The reader will remember that, although entitled to the throne of Argos by right of descent from Perseus and Danaus, and to the thrones of Sparta and Messenia by right of conquest, Hercules yet passed his life in labours and wanderings, subjected by the decree of fate to the commands of his kinsman, the feeble and malignant Eurystheus. At his death he bequeathed to his offspring, the Heracleidæ, his own claims to the kingdoms of Peloponnesus, and to the persecution of Eurystheus. They at first sought shelter with Ceyx, king of Trachis; he was too weak to protect them, and they then took refuge at Athens. The Athenians refused to deliver them up at the demand of Eurystheus; he invaded Attica, and a battle was fought near Marathon, in which, after Macaria, a daughter of Hercules, had devoted herself for the preservation of her house, Eurystheus fell, and the Heracleidæ and their Athenian protectors were victorious. The memory of

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Macaria's self-sacrifice was perpetuated by the name of a spring of water on the plain of Marathon, the spring Macaria. The Heracleidæ then endeavoured to effect their return to Peloponnesus. Hyllus, the eldest of them, inquired of the oracle at Delphi respecting their return; he was told to return by the *narrow passage*, and in the *third harvest*. Accordingly, in the third year from that time, Hyllus led an army to the Isthmus of Corinth; but there he was encountered by an army of Achaians and Arcadians, and fell in single combat with Echemus, king of Tegea. Upon this defeat the Heracleidæ retired to Northern Greece; there, after much wandering, they finally took refuge with Ægimius, king of the Dorians, who appears to have been the fastest friend of their house, and whose Dorian warriors formed the army which at last achieved their return. But, for a hundred years from the date of their first attempt, the Heracleidæ were defeated in their successive invasions of Peloponnesus. Cleolaus and Aristomachus, the son and grandson of Hyllus, fell in unsuccessful expeditions. At length the sons of Aristomachus, Temenus, Cresphontes, and Aristodemus, when grown up, repaired to Delphi and taxed the oracle with the non-fulfilment of the promise made to their ancestor Hyllus. But Apollo replied that his oracle had been misunderstood; for that by the *third harvest* he had meant the third generation, and by the *narrow passage* he had meant the straits of the Corinthian Gulf. After this explanation the sons of Aristomachus built a fleet at Naupactus; and finally, in the hundredth year from the death of Hyllus and the eightieth from the fall of Troy, the invasion was again attempted and was this time successful. The son of Orestes, Tisamenus, who ruled both Argos and Lacedæmon, fell in battle; many of his vanquished subjects left their homes and took refuge in Achaia.

The spoil was now to be divided among the conquerors. Aristodemus, the youngest of the sons of Aristomachus, did not survive to enjoy his share. He was slain at Delphi by the sons of Pylades and Electra, the kinsmen, through their mother, of the house of Agamemnon, that house which the Heracleidæ with their Dorian army had dispossessed. The claims of Aristodemus descended to his two sons, Procles and Eurysthenes, children under the guardianship of their maternal uncle, Theras.

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Temenus, the eldest of the sons of Aristomachus, took the kingdom of Argos. For the two remaining kingdoms, that of Sparta and that of Messenia, his two nephews, who were to rule jointly, and their uncle Cresphontes, had to cast lots. Cresphontes wished to have the fertile Messenia, and induced his brother to acquiesce in a trick which secured it to him. The lot of Cresphontes and that of his two nephews were to be placed in a water-jar, and thrown out. Messenia was to belong to him whose lot came out first. With the connivance of Temenus, Cresphontes marked as his own lot a pellet composed of baked clay, as the lot of his nephews a pellet of unbaked clay; the unbaked pellet was of course dissolved in the water, while the brick pellet fell out alone. Messenia, therefore, was assigned to Cresphontes.

Messenia was at this time ruled by Melanthus, a descendant of Neleus. This ancestor, a prince of the great house of Æolus, had come from Thessaly and succeeded to the Messenian throne on the failure of the previous dynasty. Melanthus and his race were thus foreigners in Messenia and were unpopular. His subjects offered little or no opposition to the invading Dorians; Melanthus abandoned his kingdom to Cresphontes, and retired to Athens.

Cresphontes married Merope, whose native country, Arcadia, was not affected by the Dorian invasion. This marriage, the issue of which was three sons, connected him with the native population of Peloponnesus. He built a new capital of Messenia, Stenyclaros, and transferred thither, from Pylos, the seat of government; he proposed, moreover, says Pausanias, to divide Messenia into five states, and to confer on the native Messenians equal privileges with their Dorian conquerors. The Dorians complained that his administration unduly favoured the vanquished people; his chief magnates, headed by Polyphontes, himself a descendant of Hercules, formed a cabal against him, and he was slain with his two eldest sons. The youngest son of Cresphontes, Æpytus, then an infant, was saved by his mother, who sent him to her father, Cypselus, the king of Arcadia, under whose protection he was brought up.

The drama begins at the moment when Æpytus, grown to manhood, returns secretly to Messenia to take vengeance on

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his father's murderers. At this period Temenus was no longer reigning at Argos; he had been murdered by his sons, jealous of their brother-in-law, Deiphontes. The sons of Aristodemus, Procles and Eurysthenes, at variance with their uncle and ex-guardian, Theras, were reigning at Sparta.

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PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

LAIAS, *uncle of* ÆPYTUS, *brother of* MEROPE.

ÆPYTUS, *son of* MEROPE *and* CRESPHONTES.

POLYPHONTES, *king of* MESSENIA.

MEROPE, *widow of* CRESPHONTES, *the murdered king of* MESSENIA.

THE CHORUS, *of* MESSENIAN *maidens.*

ARCAS, *an old man of* MEROPE'S *household.*

MESSENGER.

GUARDS, ATTENDANTS, ETC.

The Scene is before the royal palace in STENYCLAROS, *the capital of* MESSENIA. *In the foreground is the tomb of* CRESPHONTES. *The action commences at daybreak.*

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MEROPE

LAIAS. ÆPYTUS

Laias

Son of Cresphontes, we have reach'd the goal
Of our night-journey, and thou see'st thy home.
Behold thy heritage, thy father's realm!
This is that fruitful, famed Messenian land,
Wealthy in corn and flocks, which, when at last
The late-relenting Gods with victory brought
The Heracleidæ back to Pelops' isle,
Fell to thy father's lot, the second prize.
Before thy feet this recent city spreads
Of Stenyclaros, which he built, and made
Of his fresh-conquer'd realm the royal seat,
Degrading Pylos from its ancient rule.
There stands the temple of thine ancestor,
Great Heracles; and, in that public place,
Zeus hath his altar, where thy father fell.
Southward and west, behold those snowy peaks,
Taygetus, Laconia's border-wall;
And, on this side, those confluent streams which
make

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Pamisus watering the Messenian plain ;
Then to the north, Lycæus and the hills
Of pastoral Arcadia, where, a babe
Snatch'd from the slaughter of thy father's house,
Thy mother's kin received thee, and rear'd up.—
Our journey is well made, the work remains
Which to perform we made it ; means for that
Let us consult, before this palace sends
Its inmates on their daily tasks abroad.
Haste and advise, for day comes on apace.

Æpytus

O brother of my mother, guardian true,
And second father from that hour when first
My mother's faithful servant laid me down,
An infant, at the hearth of Cypselus,
My grandfather, the good Arcadian king—
Thy part it were to advise, and mine to obey.
But let us keep that purpose, which, at home,
We judged the best ; chance finds no better way.
Go thou into the city, and seek out
Whate'er in the Messenian people stirs
Of faithful fondness for their former king
Or hatred to their present ; in this last
Will lie, my grandsire said, our fairest chance.
For tyrants make man good beyond himself ;
Hate to their rule, which else would die away,
Their daily-practised chafings keep alive.
Seek this ! revive, unite it, give it hope ;
Bid it rise boldly at the signal given.

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Meanwhile within my father's palace I,
An unknown guest, will enter, bringing word
Of my own death—but, Laias, well I hope
Through that pretended death to live and reign.

[THE CHORUS *comes forth.*

Softly, stand back !—see, to these palace gates
What black procession slowly makes approach ?—
Sad-chanting maidens clad in mourning robes,
With pitchers in their hands, and fresh-pull'd flowers—
Doubtless, they bear them to my father's tomb.

[MEROPE *comes forth.*

And look, to meet them, that one, grief-plunged Form,
Severer, paler, statelier than they all,
A golden circlet on her queenly brow !
O Laias, Laias, let the heart speak here—
Shall I not greet her ? shall I not leap forth ?

[POLYPHONTES *comes forth, following* MEROPE.

Laias

Not so ! thy heart would pay its moment's speech
By silence ever after ; for, behold !
The King (I know him, even through many years)
Follows the approaching Queen, who stops, as call'd.
No lingering now ! straight to the city I ;
Do thou, till for thine entrance to this house

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The happy moment comes, lurk here unseen
Behind the shelter of thy father's tomb ;
Remove yet further off, if aught comes near.
But, here while harbouring, on its margin lay,
Sole offering that thou hast, locks from thy head ;
And fill thy leisure with an earnest prayer
To his avenging Shade, and to the Gods
Who under earth watch guilty deeds of men,
To guide our vengeance to a prosperous close.

[LAIAS *goes out.* POLYPHONTES, MEROPE, *and* THE CHORUS *come forward. As they advance,* ÆPYTUS, *who at first conceals himself behind the tomb, moves off the stage.*

Polyphontes (*to* THE CHORUS)

Set down your pitchers, maidens, and fall back !
Suspend your melancholy rites awhile ;
Shortly ye shall resume them with your Queen.—

(*To* MEROPE)

I sought thee, Merope ; I find thee thus,
As I have ever found thee ; bent to keep,
By sad observances and public grief,
A mournful feud alive, which else would die.
I blame thee not, I do thy heart no wrong !
Thy deep seclusion, thine unyielding gloom,
Thine attitude of cold, estranged reproach,
These punctual funeral honours, year by year

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Repeated, are in thee, I well believe,
Courageous, faithful actions, nobly dared.
But, Merope, the eyes of other men
Read in these actions, innocent in thee,
Perpetual promptings to rebellious hope,
War-cries to faction, year by year renew'd,
Beacons of vengeance, not to be let die.
And me, believe it, wise men gravely blame,
And ignorant men despise me, that I stand
Passive, permitting thee what course thou wilt.
Yes, the crowd mutters that remorseful fear
And paralysing conscience stop my arm,
When it should pluck thee from thy hostile way.
All this I bear, for, what I seek, I know :
Peace, peace is what I seek, and public calm ;
Endless extinction of unhappy hates,
Union cemented for this nation's weal.
And even now, if to behold me here,
This day, amid these rites, this black-robed train,
Wakens, O Queen ! remembrance in thy heart
Too wide at variance with the peace I seek—
I will not violate thy noble grief,
The prayer I came to urge I will defer.

Merope

This day, to-morrow, yesterday, alike
I am, I shall be, have been, in my mind
Tow'rd thee ; toward thy silence as thy speech.
Speak, therefore, or keep silence, which thou wilt.

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Polyphontes

Hear me, then, speak ; and let this mournful day,
The twentieth anniversary of strife,
Henceforth be honour'd as the date of peace.
Yes, twenty years ago this day beheld
The king Cresphontes, thy great husband, fall ;
It needs no yearly offerings at his tomb
To keep alive that memory in my heart—
It lives, and, while I see the light, will live.
For we were kinsmen—more than kinsmen—
friends ;
Together we had grown, together lived ;
Together to this isle of Pelops came
To take the inheritance of Heracles,
Together won this fair Messenian land—
Alas, that, how to rule it, was our broil !
He had his counsel, party, friends—I mine ;
He stood by what he wish'd for—I the same ;
I smote him, when our wishes clash'd in arms—
He had smit me, had he been swift as I.
But while I smote him, Queen, I honour'd him ;
Me, too, had he prevail'd, he had not scorn'd.
Enough of this ! Since that, I have maintain'd
The sceptre—not remissly let it fall—
And I am seated on a prosperous throne ;
Yet still, for I conceal it not, ferments
In the Messenian people what remains
Of thy dead husband's faction—vigorous once,
Now crush'd but not quite lifeless by his fall.
And these men look to thee, and from thy grief—

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Something too studiously, forgive me, shown—
Infer thee their accomplice ; and they say
That thou in secret nurturest up thy son,
Him whom thou hiddest when thy husband fell,
To avenge that fall, and bring them back to power.
Such are their hopes—I ask not if by thee
Willingly fed or no—their most vain hopes ;
For I have kept conspiracy fast-chain'd
Till now, and I have strength to chain it still.
But, Merope, the years advance ;—I stand
Upon the threshold of old age, alone,
Always in arms, always in face of foes.
The long repressive attitude of rule
Leaves me austerer, sterner, than I would ;
Old age is more suspicious than the free
And valiant heart of youth, or manhood's firm
Unclouded reason ; I would not decline
Into a jealous tyrant, scourged with fears,
Closing in blood and gloom his sullen reign.
The cares which might in me with time, I feel,
Beget a cruel temper, help me quell !
The breach between our parties help me close !
Assist me to rule mildly ; let us join
Our hands in solemn union, making friends
Our factions with the friendship of their chiefs.
Let us in marriage, King and Queen, unite
Claims ever hostile else, and set thy son—
No more an exile fed on empty hopes,
And to an unsubstantial title heir,
But prince adopted by the will of power,

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And future king—before this people's eyes.
Consider him ! consider not old hates !
Consider, too, this people, who were dear
To their dead king, thy husband—yea, too dear,
For that destroy'd him. Give them peace ! thou can'st.
O Merope, how many noble thoughts,
How many precious feelings of man's heart,
How many loves, how many gratitudes,
Do twenty years wear out, and see expire !
Shall they not wear one hatred out as well ?

Merope

Thou hast forgot, then, who I am who hear,
And who thou art who speakest to me ? I
Am Merope, thy murder'd master's wife ;
And thou art Polyphontes, first his friend,
And then . . . his murderer. These offending tears
That murder moves ; this breach that thou would'st close
Was by that murder open'd ; that one child
(If still, indeed, he lives) whom thou would'st seat
Upon a throne not thine to give, is heir,
Because thou slew'st his brothers with their father.
Who can patch union here ? What can there be
But everlasting horror 'twixt us two,
Gulfs of estranging blood ? Across that chasm

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Who can extend their hands? . . . Maidens,
take back
These offerings home! our rites are spoil'd to-day.

Polyphontes

Not so; let these Messenian maidens mark
The fear'd and blacken'd ruler of their race,
Albeit with lips unapt to self-excuse,
Blow off the spot of murder from his name.—
Murder!—but what *is* murder? When a wretch
For private gain or hatred takes a life,
We call it murder, crush him, brand his name.
But when, for some great public cause, an arm
Is, without love or hate, austerely raised
Against a power exempt from common checks,
Dangerous to all, to be but thus annull'd—
Ranks any man with murder such an act?
With grievous deeds, perhaps; with murder, no!
Find then such cause, the charge of murder falls—
Be judge thyself if it abound not here.
All know how weak the eagle, Heracles,
Soaring from his death-pile on Œta, left
His puny, callow eaglets; and what trials—
Infirm protectors, dubious oracles
Construed awry, misplann'd invasions—wore
Three generations of his offspring out;
Hardly the fourth, with grievous loss, regain'd
Their fathers' realm, this isle, from Pelops named.
Who made that triumph, though deferr'd, secure?
Who, but the kinsmen of the royal brood

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Of Heracles, scarce Heracleidæ less
Than they? these, and the Dorian lords, whose king
Ægimius gave our outcast house a home
When Thebes, when Athens dared not; who in arms
Thrice issued with us from their pastoral vales,
And shed their blood like water in our cause?
Such were the dispossessors; of what stamp
Were they we dispossessed?—of us I speak,
Who to Messenia with thy husband came;
I speak not now of Argos, where his brother,
Not now of Sparta, where his nephews reign'd.—
What we found here were tribes of fame obscure,
Much turbulence, and little constancy,
Precariously ruled by foreign lords
From the Æolian stock of Neleus sprung,
A house once great, now dwindling in its sons.
Such were the conquer'd, such the conquerors; who
Had most thy husband's confidence? Consult
His acts! the wife he chose was—full of virtues—
But an Arcadian princess, more akin
To his new subjects than to us; his friends
Were the Messenian chiefs; the laws he framed
Were aim'd at their promotion, our decline.
And, finally, this land, then half-subdued,
Which from one central city's guarded seat
As from a fastness in the rocks our scant
Handful of Dorian conquerors might have curb'd,
He parcell'd out in five confederate states,

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Sowing his victors thinly through them all,
Mere prisoners, meant or not, among our foes.
If this was fear of them, it shamed the king ;
If jealousy of us, it shamed the man.
Long we refrain'd ourselves, submitted long,
Construed his acts indulgently, revered,
Though found perverse, the blood of Heracles ;
Reluctantly the rest—but, against all,
One voice preach'd patience, and that voice was mine !
At last it reach'd us, that he, still mistrustful,
Deeming, as tyrants deem, our silence hate,
Unadulating grief conspiracy,
Had to this city, Stenyclaros, call'd
A general assemblage of the realm,
With compact in that concourse to deliver,
For death, his ancient to his new-made friends.
Patience was thenceforth self-destruction. I,
I his chief kinsman, I his pioneer
And champion to the throne, I honouring most
Of men the line of Heracles, preferr'd
The many of that lineage to the one ;
What his foes dared not, I, his lover, dared ;
I at that altar, where mid shouting crowds
He sacrificed, our ruin in his heart,
To Zeus, before he struck his blow, struck mine—
Struck once, and awed his mob, and saved this realm.
Murder let others call this, if they will ;
I, self-defence and righteous execution.

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Merope

Alas, how fair a colour can his tongue,
Who self-exculpates, lend to foulest deeds !
Thy trusting lord didst thou, his servant, slay ;
Kinsman, thou slew'st thy kinsman ; friend, thy friend—
This were enough ; but let me tell thee, too,
Thou hadst no cause, as feign'd, in his misrule.
For ask at Argos, ask in Lacedæmon,
Whose people, when the Heracleidæ came,
Were hunted out, and to Achaia fled,
Whether is better, to abide alone,
A wolfish band, in a dispeopled realm,
Or conquerors with conquer'd to unite
Into one puissant folk, as he design'd ?
These sturdy and unworn Messenian tribes,
Who shook the fierce Neleidæ on their throne,
Who to the invading Dorians stretch'd a hand,
And half bestow'd, half yielded up their soil—
He would not let his savage chiefs alight,
A cloud of vultures, on this vigorous race,
Ravin a little while in spoil and blood,
Then, gorged and helpless, be assail'd and slain.
He would have saved you from your furious selves,
Not in abhorr'd estrangement let you stand ;
He would have mix'd you with your friendly foes,
Foes dazzled with your prowess, well inclined
To reverence your lineage, more, to obey ;

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So would have built you, in a few short years,
A just, therefore a safe, supremacy.
For well he knew, what you, his chiefs, did not—
How of all human rules the over-tense
Are apt to snap ; the easy-stretch'd endure.
O gentle wisdom, little understood !
O arts above the vulgar tyrant's reach !
O policy too subtle far for sense
Of heady, masterful, injurious men !
This good he meant you, and for this he died !
Yet not for this—else might thy crime in part
Be error deem'd—but that pretence is vain.
For, if ye slew him for supposed misrule,
Injustice to his kin and Dorian friends,
Why with the offending father did ye slay
Two unoffending babes, his innocent sons ?
Why not on them have placed the forfeit crown,
Ruled in their name, and train'd them to your will ?
Had *they* misruled ? had *they* forgot their friends,
Forsworn their blood ? ungratefully had *they*
Preferr'd Messenian serfs to Dorian lords ?
No ! but to thy ambition their poor lives
Were bar—and this, too, was their father's crime.
That thou might'st reign he died, not for his fault
Even fancied ; and his death thou wroughtest chief !
For, if the other lords desired his fall
Hotlier than thou, and were by thee kept back,
Why dost thou only profit by his death ?

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Thy crown condemns thee, while thy tongue absolves.
And now to me thou tenderest friendly league,
And to my son reversion to thy throne!
Short answer is sufficient; league with thee,
For me I deem such impious; and for him
Exile abroad more safe than heirship here.

Polyphontes

I ask thee not to approve thy husband's death,
No, nor expect thee to admit the grounds,
In reason good, which justified my deed.
With women the heart argues, not the mind.
But, for thy children's death, I stand assoil'd—
I saved them, meant them honour; but thy friends
Rose, and with fire and sword assailed my house
By night; in that blind tumult they were slain.
To chance impute their deaths, then, not to me.

Merope

Such chance as kill'd the father, kill'd the sons.

Polyphontes

One son at least I spared, for still he lives.

Merope

Tyrants think him they murder not they spare.

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Polyphontes

Not much a tyrant thy free speech displays me.

Merope

Thy shame secures my freedom, not thy will.

Polyphontes

Shame rarely checks the genuine tyrant's will.

Merope

One merit, then, thou hast ; exult in that.

Polyphontes

Thou standest out, I see, repellest peace.

Merope

Thy sword repell'd it long ago, not I.

Polyphontes

Doubtless thou reckonest on the help of friends.

Merope

Not help of men, although, perhaps, of Gods.

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Polyphontes

What Gods? the Gods of concord, civil weal?

Merope

No! the avenging Gods, who punish crime.

Polyphontes

Beware! from thee upbraidings I receive
With pity, nay, with reverence; yet, beware!
I know, I know how hard it is to think
That right, that conscience pointed to a deed,
Where interest seems to have enjoin'd it too.
Most men are led by interest; and the few
Who are not, expiate the general sin,
Involved in one suspicion with the base.
Dizzy the path and perilous the way
Which in a deed like mine a just man treads,
But it is sometimes trodden, oh! believe it.
Yet how *canst* thou believe it? therefore thou
Hast all impunity. Yet, lest thy friends,
Embolden'd by my lenience, think it fear,
And count on like impunity, and rise,
And have to thank thee for a fall, beware!
To rule this kingdom I intend; with sway
Clement, if may be, but to rule it—there
Expect no wavering, no retreat, no change.
And now I leave thee to these rites, esteem'd
Pious, but impious, surely, if their scope

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Be to foment old memories of wrath.
Pray, as thou pour'st libations on this tomb,
To be deliver'd from thy foster'd hate,
Unjust suspicion, and erroneous fear.

[POLYPHONTES *goes into the palace.* THE CHORUS *and* MEROPE *approach the tomb with their offerings.*

The Chorus

Draw, draw near to the tomb ! *strophe.*
Lay honey-cakes on its marge,
Pour the libation of milk,
Deck it with garlands of flowers.
Tears fall thickly the while !
Behold, O King from the dark
House of the grave, what we do !

O Arcadian hills, *antistrophe.*
Send us the Youth whom ye hide,
Girt with his coat for the chase,
With the low broad hat of the tann'd
Hunter o'ershadowing his brow ;
Grasping firm, in his hand
Advanced, two javelins, not now
Dangerous alone to the deer !

Merope

What shall I bear, O lost *str.* 1.
Husband and King, to thy grave ?—

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Pure libations, and fresh
Flowers? But thou, in the gloom,
Discontented, perhaps,
Demandest vengeance, not grief?
Sternly requirest a man,
Light to spring up to thy house?

The Chorus

Vengeance, O Queen, is his due, *str.* 2.
His most just prayer; yet his house—
If that might soothe him below—
Prosperous, mighty, came back
In the third generation, the way
Order'd by Fate, to their home;
And now, glorious, secure,
Fill the wealth-giving thrones
Of their heritage, Pelops' isle.

Merope

Suffering sent them, Death *ant.* 1.
March'd with them, Hatred and Strife
Met them entering their halls.
For from the day when the first
Heracleidæ received
That Delphic hest to return,
What hath involved them, but blind
Error on error, and blood?

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The Chorus

Truly I hear of a Maid *ant. 2.*
Of that stock born, who bestow'd
Her blood that so she might make
Victory sure to her race,
When the fight hung in doubt! but she now,
Honour'd and sung of by all,
Far on Marathon plain,
Gives her name to the spring
Macaria, blessed Child.

Merope

She led the way of death. *str. 3.*
And the plain of Tegea,
And the grave of Orestes—
Where, in secret seclusion
Of his unreveal'd tomb,
Sleeps Agamemnon's unhappy,
Matricidal, world-famed,
Seven-cubit-statured son—
Sent forth Echemus, the victor, the king,
By whose hand, at the Isthmus,
At the fate-denied straits,
Fell the eldest of the sons of Heracles,
Hyllus, the chief of his house.
Brother follow'd sister
The all-wept way.

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The Chorus

Yes ; but his seed still, wiser-counsell'd,
Sail'd by the fate-meant Gulf to their conquest—
Slew their enemies' king, Tisamenus.
Wherefore accept that happier omen !
Yet shall restorer appear to the race.

Merope

Three brothers won the field, *ant.* 3.
And to two did Destiny
Give the thrones that they conquer'd.
But the third, what delays him
From his unattain'd crown ? . . .
Ah Pylades and Electra,
Ever faithful, untired,
Jealous, blood-exacting friends !
Your sons leap upon the foe of your kin,
In the passes of Delphi,
In the temple-built gorge !
There the youngest of the band of conquerors
Perish'd, in sight of the goal.
Thrice son follow'd sire
The all-wept way.

The Chorus

Thou tellest the fate of the last *str.* 4.
Of the three Heracleidæ.

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Not of him, of Cresphontes thou shared'st the lot !
A king, a king was he while he lived,
Swaying the sceptre with predestined hand ;
And now, minister loved,
Holds rule.

Merope

Ah me . . . Ah . . .

The Chorus

For the awful Monarchs below.

Merope

Thou touchest the worst of my ills. *str.* 5.
Oh had he fallen of old
At the Isthmus, in fight with his foes,
By Achaian, Arcadian spear !
Then had his sepulchre risen
On the high sea-bank, in the sight
Of either Gulf, and remain'd
All-regarded afar,
Noble memorial of worth
Of a valiant Chief, to his own.

The Chorus

There rose up a cry in the streets *ant.* 4.
From the terrified people.

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From the altar of Zeus, from the crowd, came a wail.
A blow, a blow was struck, and he fell,
Sullying his garment with dark-streaming blood;
While stood o'er him a Form—
Some Form

Merope

Ah me . . . Ah . . .

The Chorus

Of a dreadful Presence of fear.

Merope

More piercing the second cry rang, *ant.* 5.
Wail'd from the palace within,
From the Children. . . . The Fury to them,
Fresh from their father, draws near.
Ah bloody axe! dizzy blows!
In these ears, they thunder, they ring,
These poor ears, still! and these eyes
Night and day see them fall,
Fiery phantoms of death,
On the fair, curl'd heads of my sons.

The Chorus

Not to thee only hath come *str.* 6.
Sorrow, O Queen, of mankind.
Had not Electra to haunt
A palace defiled by a death unavenged,

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For years, in silence, devouring her heart ?
But her nursling, her hope, came at last.
Thou, too, rearest in hope,
Far 'mid Arcadian hills,
Somewhere, for vengeance, a champion, a light.
Soon, soon shall Zeus bring him home !
Soon shall he dawn on this land !

Merope

Him in secret, in tears, *str.* 7.
Month after month, I await
Vainly. For he, in the glens
Of Lycæus afar,
A gladsome hunter of deer,
Basks in his morning of youth,
Spares not a thought to his home.

The Chorus

Give not thy heart to despair. *ant.* 6.
No lamentation can loose
Prisoners of death from the grave ;
But Zeus, who accounteth thy quarrel his own,
Still rules, still watches, and numb'reth the hours
Till the sinner, the vengeance, be ripe.
Still, by Acheron stream,
Terrible Deities throned
Sit, and eye grimly the victim unscourged.
Still, still the Dorian boy,
Exiled, remembers his home.

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Merope

Him if high-ruling Zeus *ant.* 7.
Bring to me safe, let the rest
Go as it will! But if this
Clash with justice, the Gods
Forgive my folly, and work
Vengeance on sinner and sin—
Only to me give my child!

The Chorus

Hear us and help us, Shade of our King! *str.* 8.

Merope

A return, O Father! give to thy boy! *str.* 9.

The Chorus

Send an avenger, Gods of the dead! *ant.* 8.

Merope

An avenger I ask not—send me my son! *ant.* 9.

The Chorus

O Queen, for an avenger to appear,
Thinking that so I pray'd aright, I pray'd;
If I pray'd wrongly, I revoke the prayer.

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Merope

Forgive me, maidens, if I seem too slack
In calling vengeance on a murderer's head.
Impious I deem the alliance which he asks,
Requite him words severe for seeming kind,
And righteous, if he falls, I count his fall.
With this, to those unbribed inquisitors
Who in man's inmost bosom sit and judge,
The true avengers these, I leave his deed,
By him shown fair, but, I believe, most foul.
If these condemn him, let them pass his doom!
That doom obtain effect, from Gods or men!
So be it; yet will that more solace bring
To the chafed heart of Justice than to mine.
To hear another tumult in these streets,
To have another murder in these halls,
To see another mighty victim bleed—
Small comfort offers for a woman there!
A woman, O my friends, has one desire:
To see secure, to live with, those she loves.
Can vengeance give me back the murdered? no!
Can it bring home my child? Ah, if it can,
I pray the Furies' ever-restless band,
And pray the Gods, and pray the all-seeing sun:
'Sun, who careerest through the height of Heaven,
When o'er the Arcadian forests thou art come,
And see'st my stripling hunter there afield,
Put tightness in thy gold-embossed rein,
And check thy fiery steeds, and, leaning back,

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Throw him a pealing word of summons down,
To come, a late avenger, to the aid
Of this poor soul who bare him, and his sire.'
If this will bring him back, be this my prayer!
But Vengeance travels in a dangerous way,
Double of issue, full of pits and snares
For all who pass, pursuers and pursued—
That way is dubious for a mother's prayer.
Rather on thee I call, Husband beloved—
May Hermes, herald of the dead, convey
My words below to thee, and make thee hear—
Bring back our son! if may be, without blood!
Install him in thy throne, still without blood!
Grant him to reign there wise and just like thee,
More fortunate than thee, more fairly judged!
This for our son; and for myself I pray,
Soon, having once beheld him, to descend
Into the quiet gloom, where thou art now.
These words to thine indulgent ear, thy wife,
I send, and these libations pour the while.

[*They make their offerings at the tomb.* MEROPE *then turns to go towards the palace.*

The Chorus

The dead hath now his offerings duly paid.
But whither go'st thou hence, O Queen, away?

Merope

To receive Arcas, who to-day should come,
Bringing me of my boy the annual news.

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The Chorus

No certain news if like the rest it run.

Merope

Certain in this, that 'tis uncertain still.

The Chorus

What keeps him in Arcadia from return?

Merope

His grandsire and his uncles fear the risk.

The Chorus

Of what? it lies with them to make risk none.

Merope

Discovery of a visit made by stealth.

The Chorus

With arms then they should send him, not by stealth.

Merope

With arms they dare not, and by stealth they fear.

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The Chorus

I doubt their caution little suits their ward.

Merope

The heart of youth I know; that most I fear.

The Chorus

I augur thou wilt hear some bold resolve.

Merope

I dare not wish it; but, at least, to hear
That my son still survives, in health, in bloom;
To hear that still he loves, still longs for, me,
Yet, with a light uncareworn spirit, turns
Quick from distressful thought, and floats in joy—
Thus much from Arcas, my old servant true,
Who saved him from these murderous halls a babe,
And since has fondly watch'd him night and day
Save for this annual charge, I hope to hear.
If this be all, I know not; but I know,
These many years I live for this alone.

[MEROPE *goes in.*

The Chorus

Much is there which the sea *str.* 1.
Conceals from man, who cannot plumb its depths.

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Air to his unwing'd form denies a way,
And keeps its liquid solitudes unscaled.
Even earth, whereon he treads,
So feeble is his march, so slow,
Holds countless tracts untrod.

But more than all unplumb'd, *ant.* 1.
Unscaled, untrodden, is the heart of man.
More than all secrets hid, the way it keeps.
Nor any of our organs so obtuse,
Inaccurate, and frail,
As those wherewith we try to test
Feelings and motives there.

Yea, and not only have we not explored *str.* 2.
That wide and various world, the heart of others,
But even our own heart, that narrow world
Bounded in our own breast, we hardly know,
Of our own actions dimly trace the causes.
Whether a natural obscureness, hiding
That region in perpetual cloud,
Or our own want of effort, be the bar.

Therefore—while acts are from their motives judged, *ant.* 2.
And to one act many most unlike motives,
This pure, that guilty, may have each impell'd—
Power fails us to try clearly if that cause
Assign'd us by the actor be the true one;
Power fails the man himself to fix distinctly

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The cause which drew him to his deed,
And stamp himself, thereafter, bad or good.

The most are bad, wise men have said. *str.* 3.
Let the best rule, they say again.
The best, then, to dominion hath the right.
Rights unconceded and denied,
Surely, if rights, may be by force asserted—
May be, nay should, if for the general weal.
The best, then, to the throne may carve his way,
And strike opposers down,
Free from all guilt of lawlessness,
Or selfish lust of personal power;
Bent only to serve virtue,
Bent to diminish wrong.

And truly, in this ill-ruled world, *ant.* 3.
Well sometimes may the good desire
To give to virtue her dominion due!
Well may he long to interrupt
The reign of folly, usurpation ever,
Though fenced by sanction of a thousand years!
Well thirst to drag the wrongful ruler down;
Well purpose to pen back
Into the narrow path of right
The ignorant, headlong multitude,
Who blindly follow, ever,
Blind leaders, to their bane!

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But who can say, without a fear : *str.* 4.
That best, who ought to rule, am I ;
The mob, who ought to obey, are these ;
I the one righteous, they the many bad ?
Who, without check of conscience, can aver
That he to power makes way by arms,
Sheds blood, imprisons, banishes, attaints,
Commits all deeds the guilty oftenest do,
Without a single guilty thought,
Arm'd for right only, and the general good ?

Therefore, with censure unallay'd, *ant.* 4.
Therefore, with unexcepting ban,
Zeus and pure-thoughted Justice brand
Imperious self-asserting violence ;
Sternly condemn the too bold man, who dares
Elect himself Heaven's destined arm ;
And, knowing well man's inmost heart infirm,
However noble the committer be,
His grounds however specious shown,
Turn with averted eyes from deeds of blood.

Thus, though a woman, I was school'd *epode.*
By those whom I revere.
Whether I learnt their lessons well,
Or, having learnt them, well apply
To what hath in this house befall'n,
If in the event be any proof,
The event will quickly show.

[ÆPYTUS *comes in.*

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Æpytus

Maidens, assure me if they told me true
Who told me that the royal house was here.

The Chorus

Rightly they told thee, and thou art arrived.

Æpytus

Here, then, it is, where Polyphontes dwells?

The Chorus

He doth; thou hast both house and master right.

Æpytus

Might some one straight inform him he is sought?

The Chorus

Inform him that thyself, for here he comes.

[POLYPHONTES *comes forth, with* ATTENDANTS *and* GUARDS.

Æpytus

O King, all hail! I come with weighty news;
Most likely, grateful; but, in all case, sure.

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Polyphontes

Speak them, that I may judge their kind myself.

Æpytus

Accept them in one word, for good or bad :
Æpytus, the Messenian prince, is dead !

Polyphontes

Dead !—and when died he ? where ? and by what hand ?
And who art thou, who bringest me such news ?

Æpytus

He perish'd in Arcadia, where he dwelt
With Cypselus ; and two days since he died.
One of the train of Cypselus am I.

Polyphontes

Instruct me of the manner of his death.

Æpytus

That will I do, and to this end I came.
For, being of like age, of birth not mean,
The son of an Arcadian noble, I
Was chosen his companion from a boy ;

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And on the hunting-rambles which his heart,
Unquiet, drove him ever to pursue
Through all the lordships of the Arcadian dales,
From chief to chief, I wander'd at his side,
The captain of his squires, and his guard.
On such a hunting-journey, three morns since,
With beaters, hounds, and huntsmen, he and I
Set forth from Tegea, the royal town.
The prince at start seem'd sad, but his regard
Clear'd with blithe travel and the morning air.
We rode from Tegea, through the woods of oaks,
Past Arnê spring, where Rhea gave the babe
Poseidon to the shepherd-boys to hide
From Saturn's search among the new-yean'd lambs,
To Mantineia, with its unbaked walls;
Thence, by the Sea-God's Sanctuary and the tomb
Whither from wintry Mænalus were brought
The bones of Arcas, whence our race is named,
On, to the marshy Orchomenian plain,
And the Stone Coffins;—then, by Caphyæ Cliffs,
To Pheneos with its craggy citadel.
There, with the chief of that hill-town, we lodged
One night; and the next day at dawn fared on
By the Three Fountains and the Adder's Hill
To the Stymphalian Lake, our journey's end,
To draw the coverts on Cyllenê's side.
There, on a high green spur which bathes its point
Far in the liquid lake, we sate, and drew

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Cates from our hunters' pouch, Arcadian fare,
Sweet chestnuts, barley-cakes, and boar's-flesh dried;
And as we ate, and rested there, we talk'd
Of places we had pass'd, sport we had had,
Of beasts of chase that haunt the Arcadian hills,
Wild hog, and bear, and mountain-deer, and roe;
Last, of our quarters with the Arcadian chiefs.
For courteous entertainment, welcome warm,
Sad, reverential homage, had our prince
From all, for his great lineage and his woes;
All which he own'd, and praised with grateful mind.
But still over his speech a gloom there hung,
As of one shadow'd by impending death;
And strangely, as we talk'd, he would apply
The story of spots mention'd to his own;
Telling us, Arnê minded him, he too
Was saved a babe, but to a life obscure,
Which he, the seed of Heracles, dragg'd on
Inglorious, and should drop at last unknown,
Even as those dead unepitaph'd, who lie
In the stone coffins at Orchomenus.
And, then, he bade remember how we pass'd
The Mantineän Sanctuary, forbid
To foot of mortal, where his ancestor,
Named Æpytus like him, having gone in,
Was blinded by the outgushing springs of brine.
Then, turning westward to the Adder's Hill—
Another ancestor, named, too, like me,
Died of a snake-bite, said he, *on that brow;*

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Still at his mountain-tomb men marvel, built
Where, as life ebb'd, his bearers laid him down.
So he play'd on ; then ended, with a smile :
This region is not happy for my race.
We cheer'd him ; but, that moment, from the copse
By the lake-edge, broke the sharp cry of hounds ;
The prickers shouted that the stag was gone.
We sprang upon our feet, we snatch'd our spears,
We bounded down the swarded slope, we plunged
Through the dense ilex-thickets to the dogs.
Far in the woods ahead their music rang ;
And many times that morn we coursed in ring
The forests round that belt Cyllenê's side ;
Till I, thrown out and tired, came to halt
On that same spur where we had sate at morn.
And resting there to breathe, I watch'd the chase—
Rare, straggling hunters, foil'd by brake and crag,
And the prince, single, pressing on the rear
Of that unflagging quarry and the hounds.
Now in the woods far down I saw them cross
An open glade ; now he was high aloft
On some tall scar fringed with dark feathery pines,
Peering to spy a goat-track down the cliff,
Cheering with hand, and voice, and horn his dogs.
At last the cry drew to the water's edge—
And through the brushwood, to the pebbly strand,

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Broke, black with sweat, the antler'd mountain-
stag,
And took the lake. Two hounds alone pursued,
Then came the prince ; he shouted and plunged
in.
—There is a chasm rifted in the base
Of that unfooted precipice, whose rock
Walls on one side the deep Stymphalian Lake ;
There the lake-waters, which in ages gone
Wash'd, as the marks upon the hills still show,
All the Stymphalian plain, are now suck'd down.
A headland, with one aged plane-tree crown'd,
Parts from this cave-pierced cliff the shelving bay
Where first the chase plunged in ; the bay is
smooth,
But round the headland's point a current sets,
Strong, black, tempestuous, to the cavern-mouth.
Stoutly, under the headland's lee, they swam ;
But when they came abreast the point, the race
Caught them as wind takes feathers, whirl'd
them round
Struggling in vain to cross it, swept them on,
Stag, dogs, and hunter, to the yawning gulph.
All this, O King, not piecemeal, as to thee
Now told, but in one flashing instant pass'd.
While from the turf whereon I lay I sprang
And took three strides, quarry and dogs were
gone ;
A moment more—I saw the prince turn round
Once in the black and arrowy race, and cast
An arm aloft for help ; then sweep beneath

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The low-brow'd cavern-arch, and disappear.
And what I could, I did—to call by cries
Some straggling hunters to my aid, to rouse
Fishers who live on the lake-side, to launch
Boats, and approach, near as we dared, the chasm.
But of the prince nothing remain'd, save this,
His boar-spear's broken shaft, back on the lake
Cast by the rumbling subterranean stream ;
And this, at landing spied by us and saved,
His broad-brimm'd hunter's hat, which, in the bay,
Where first the stag took water, floated still.
And I across the mountains brought with haste
To Cypselus, at Basilis, this news—
Basilis, his new city, which he now
Near Lycosura builds, Lycaon's town,
First city founded on the earth by men.
He to thee sends me on, in one thing glad,
While all else grieves him, that his grandchild's death
Extinguishes distrust 'twixt him and thee.
But I from our deplored mischance learn this :
The man who to untimely death is doom'd,
Vainly you hedge him from the assault of harm ;
He bears the seed of ruin in himself.

The Chorus

So dies the last shoot of our royal tree !
Who shall tell Merope this heavy news ?

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Polyphontes

Stranger, this news thou bringest is too great
For instant comment, having many sides
Of import, and in silence best received,
Whether it turn at last to joy or woe.
But thou, the zealous bearer, hast no part
In what it hath of painful, whether now,
First heard, or in its future issue shown.
Thou for thy labour hast deserved our best
Refreshment, needed by thee, as I judge,
With mountain-travel and night-watching spent.—
To the guest-chamber lead him, some one! give
All entertainment which a traveller needs,
And such as fits a royal house to show;
To friends, still more, and labourers in our cause.

[ATTENDANTS *conduct* ÆPYTUS *within the palace.*

The Chorus

The youth is gone within; alas! he bears
A presence sad for some one through those doors.

Polyphontes

Admire then, maidens, how in one short hour
The schemes, pursued in vain for twenty years,
Are—by a stroke, though undesired, complete—
Crown'd with success, not in my way, but Heaven's!

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This at a moment, too, when I had urged
A last, long-cherish'd project, in my aim
Of peace, and been repulsed with hate and scorn.
Fair terms of reconcilement, equal rule,
I offer'd to my foes, and they refused ;
Worse terms than mine they have obtain'd from
Heaven.
Dire is this blow for Merope ; and I
Wish'd, truly wish'd, solution to our broil
Other than by this death ; but it hath come !
I speak no word of boast, but this I say :
A private loss here founds a nation's peace.

[POLYPHONTES *goes out.*

The Chorus

Peace, who tarriest too long ; *str.*
Peace, with delight in thy train ;
Come, come back to our prayer !
Then shall the revel again
Visit our streets, and the sound
Of the harp be heard with the pipe,
When the flashing torches appear
In the marriage-train coming on,
With dancing maidens and boys—
While the matrons come to the doors,
And the old men rise from their bench,
When the youths bring home the bride.

Not condemn'd by my voice *ant.*
He who restores thee shall be,

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Not unfavour'd by Heaven.
Surely no sinner the man,
Dread though his acts, to whose hand
Such a boon to bring hath been given.
Let her come, fair Peace ! let her come !
But the demons long nourish'd here,
Murder, Discord, and Hate,
In the stormy desolate waves
Of the Thracian Sea let her leave,
Or the howling outermost main !

[MEROPE *comes forth.*

Merope

A whisper through the palace flies of one
Arrived from Tegea with weighty news ;
And I came, thinking to find Arcas here.
Ye have not left this gate, which he must pass ;
Tell me—hath one not come ? or, worse mischance,
Come, but been intercepted by the King ?

The Chorus

A messenger, sent from Arcadia here,
Arrived, and of the King had speech but now.

Merope

Ah me ! the wrong expectant got his news.

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The Chorus

The message brought was for the King design'd.

Merope

How so? was Arcas not the messenger?

The Chorus

A younger man, and of a different name.

Merope

And what Arcadian news had he to tell?

The Chorus

Learn that from other lips, O Queen, than mine.

Merope

He kept his tale, then, for the King alone?

The Chorus

His tale was meeter for that ear than thine.

Merope

Why dost thou falter, and make half reply?

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The Chorus

O thrice unhappy, how I groan thy fate !

Merope

Thou frightenest and confound'st me by thy words.
O were but Arcas come, all would be well !

The Chorus

If so, all's well : for look, the old man speeds
Up from the city tow'rd this gated hill.

[ARCAS *comes in.*

Merope

Not with the failing breath and foot of age
My faithful follower comes. Welcome, old friend !

Arcas

Faithful, not welcome, when my tale is told.
O that my over-speed and bursting grief
Had on the journey choked my labouring breath,
And lock'd my speech for ever in my breast !
Yet then another man would bring this news,
Wherewith from end to end Arcadia rings.—
O honour'd Queen, thy son, my charge, is gone.

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The Chorus

Too suddenly thou tellest such a loss.
Look up, O Queen ! look up, O mistress dear !
Look up, and see thy friends who comfort thee.

Merope

Ah . . . Ah . . . Ah me !

The Chorus

And I, too, say, ah me !

Arcas

Forgive, forgive the bringer of such news !

Merope

Better from thine than from an enemy's tongue.

The Chorus

And yet no enemy did this, O Queen :
But the wit-baffling will and hand of Heaven.

Arcas

No enemy ! and what hast thou, then, heard ?
Swift as I came, hath falsehood been before ?

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The Chorus

A youth arrived but now—the son, he said,
Of an Arcadian lord—our prince's friend—
Jaded with travel, clad in hunter's garb.
He brought report that his own eyes had seen
The prince, in chase after a swimming stag,
Swept down a chasm rifted in the cliff
Which hangs o'er the Stymphalian Lake, and
drown'd.

Arcas

Ah me! with what a foot doth treason post,
While loyalty, with all her speed, is slow!
Another tale, I trow, thy messenger
For the King's private ear reserves, like this
In one thing only, that the prince is dead.

The Chorus

And how then runs this true and private tale?

Arcas

As much to the King's wish, more to his shame.
This young Arcadian noble, guard and mate
To Æpytus, the king seduced with gold,
And had him at the prince's side in leash,
Ready to slip on his unconscious prey.
He on a hunting party two days since,

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Among the forests on Cyllenê's side,
Perform'd good service for his bloody wage;
Our prince, and the good Laias, whom his ward
Had in a father's place, he basely murder'd.
'Tis so, 'tis so, alas, for see the proof:
Uncle and nephew disappear; their death
Is charged against this stripling; agents, fee'd
To ply 'twixt the Messenian king and him,
Come forth, denounce the traffic and the traitor.
Seized, he escapes—and next I find him here.
Take this for true, the other tale for feign'd.

The Chorus

The youth, thou say'st, we saw and heard but now—

Arcas

He comes to tell his prompter he hath sped.

The Chorus

Still he repeats the drowning story here.

Arcas

To thee—that needs no Œdipus to explain.

The Chorus

Interpret, then; for we, it seems, are dull.

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Arcas

Your King desired the profit of his death,
Not the black credit of his murderer.
That stern word '*murder*' had too dread a sound
For the Messenian hearts, who loved the prince.

The Chorus

Suspicion grave I see, but no firm proof.

Merope

Peace! peace! all's clear.—The wicked watch and work
While the good sleep; the workers have the day.
Yes! yes! now I conceive the liberal grace
Of this far-scheming tyrant, and his boon
Of heirship to his kingdom for my son:
He had his murderer ready, and the sword
Lifted, and that unwish'd-for heirship void—
A tale, meanwhile, forged for his subjects' ears—
And me, henceforth sole rival with himself
In their allegiance, me, in my son's death-hour,
When all turn'd tow'rds me, me he would have shown
To my Messenians, duped, disarm'd, despised,
The willing sharer of his guilty rule,
All claim to succour forfeit, to myself
Hateful, by each Messenian heart abhorr'd.
His offers I repell'd—but what of that?

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If with no rage, no fire of righteous hate,
Such as ere now hath spurr'd to fearful deeds
Weak women with a thousandth part my wrongs,
But calm, but unresentful, I endured
His offers, coldly heard them, cold repell'd?
How must men think me abject, void of heart,
While all this time I bear to linger on
In this blood-deluged palace, in whose halls
Either a vengeful Fury I should stalk,
Or else not live at all!—but here I haunt,
A pale, unmeaning ghost, powerless to fright
Or harm, and nurse my longing for my son,
A helpless one, I know it—but the Gods
Have temper'd me e'en thus, and, in some souls,
Misery, which rouses others, breaks the spring.
And even now, my son, ah me! my son,
Fain would I fade away, as I have lived,
Without a cry, a struggle, or a blow,
All vengeance unattempted, and descend
To the invisible plains, to roam with thee,
Fit denizen, the lampless under-world—
But with what eyes should I encounter there
My husband, wandering with his stern compeers,
Amphiaraos, or Mycenæ's king,
Who led the Greeks to Ilium, Agamemnon,
Betray'd like him, but, not like him, avenged?
Or with what voice shall I the questions meet
Of my two elder sons, slain long ago,
Who sadly ask me, what, if not revenge,
Kept me, their mother, from their side so long?
Or how reply to thee, my child last-born,

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Last-murder'd, who reproachfully wilt say :
Mother, I well believed thou lived'st on
In the detested palace of thy foe,
With patience on thy face, death in thy heart,
Counting, till I grew up, the laggard years,
That our joint hands might then together pay
To our unhappy house the debt we owe.
My death makes my debt void, and doubles thine—
But down thou fleest here, and leav'st our scourge
Triumphant, and condemnest all our race
To lie in gloom for ever unappeased.
What shall I have to answer to such words ?—
No, something must be dared ; and, great as erst
Our dastard patience, be our daring now !
Come, ye swift Furies, who to him ye haunt
Permit no peace till your behests are done ;
Come, Hermes, who dost friend the unjustly kill'd,
And can'st teach simple ones to plot and feign ;
Come, lightning Passion, that with foot of fire
Advancest to the middle of a deed
Almost before 'tis plann'd ; come, glowing Hate ;
Come, baneful Mischief, from thy murky den
Under the dripping black Tartarean cliff
Which Styx's awful waters trickle down—
Inspire this coward heart, this flagging arm !
How say ye, maidens, do ye know these prayers ?
Are these words Merope's—is this voice mine ?
Old man, old man, thou had'st my boy in charge,
And he is lost, and thou hast that to atone !
Fly, find me on the instant where confer

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The murderer and his impious setter-on—
And ye, keep faithful silence, friends, and mark
What one weak woman can achieve alone.

Arcas

O mistress, by the Gods, do nothing rash !

Merope

Unfaithful servant, dost thou, too, desert me ?

Arcas

I go ! I go !—The King holds council—there
Will I seek tidings. Take, the while, this word :
Attempting deeds beyond thy power to do,
Thou nothing profitest thy friends, but mak'st
Our misery more, and thine own ruin sure.

[ARCAS *goes out.*

The Chorus

I have heard, O Queen, how a prince, *str.* 1.
Agamemnon's son, in Mycenæ,
Orestes, died but in name,
Lived for the death of his foes.

Merope

Peace !

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The Chorus

What is it?

Merope

Alas,
Thou destroyest me!

The Chorus

How?

Merope

Whispering hope of a life
Which no stranger unknown,
But the faithful servant and nurse,
Whose tears warrant his truth,
Bears sad witness is lost.

The Chorus

Wheresoe'er men are, there is grief. *ant.* 1.
In a thousand countries, a thousand
Homes, e'en now is there wail;
Mothers lamenting their sons.

Merope

Yes——

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The Chorus

Thou knowest it?

Merope

This,
Who lives, witnesses.

The Chorus

True.

Merope

But is it only a fate
Sure, all-common, to lose
In a land of friends, by a friend,
One last, murder-saved child?

The Chorus

Ah me! *str. 2.*

Merope

Thou confessest the prize
In the rushing, thundering, mad,
Cloud-enveloped, obscure,
Unapplauded, unsung
Race of calamity, mine?

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The Chorus

None can truly claim that
Mournful preëminence, not
Thou.

Merope

Fate *gives* it, ah me !

The Chorus

Not, above all, in the doubts,
Double and clashing, that hang——

Merope

What then ? *ant.* 2.
Seems it lighter, my loss,
If, perhaps, unpierced by the sword,
My child lies in his jagg'd
Sunless prison of rock,
On the black wave borne to and fro ?

The Chorus

Worse, far worse, if his friend,
If the Arcadian within,
If——

Merope (*with a start*)

How say'st thou ? within ? . . .

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The Chorus

He in the guest-chamber now,
Faithlessly murder'd his friend.

Merope

Ye, too, ye, too, join to betray, then,
Your Queen !

The Chorus

What is this ?

Merope

Ye knew,
O false friends ! into what
Haven the murderer had dropp'd ?
Ye kept silence ?

The Chorus

In fear,
O loved mistress ! in fear,
Dreading thine over-wrought mood,
What I knew, I conceal'd.

Merope

Swear by the Gods henceforth to obey me !

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The Chorus

Unhappy one, what deed
Purposes thy despair?
I promise; but I fear.

Merope

From the altar, the unavenged tomb,
Fetch me the sacrifice-axe!——

[THE CHORUS *goes towards the tomb of* CRESPHONTES, *and their leader brings back the axe.*

O Husband, O clothed
With the grave's everlasting,
All-covering darkness! O King,
Well mourn'd, but ill-avenged!
Approv'st thou thy wife now?——
The axe!—who brings it?

The Chorus

'Tis here!
But thy gesture, thy look,
Appals me, shakes me with awe.

Merope

Thrust back now the bolt of that door!

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The Chorus

Alas ! alas !—
Behold the fastenings withdrawn
Of the guest-chamber door !—
Ah ! I beseech thee—with tears——

Merope

Throw the door open !

The Chorus

'Tis done ! . . .

[*The door of the house is thrown open: the interior of the guest-chamber is discovered, with* ÆPYTUS *asleep on a couch.*

Merope

He sleeps—sleeps calm. O ye all-seeing Gods !
Thus peacefully do ye let sinners sleep,
While troubled innocents toss, and lie awake ?
What sweeter sleep than this could I desire
For thee, my child, if thou wert yet alive ?
How often have I dream'd of thee like this,
With thy soil'd hunting-coat, and sandals torn,
Asleep in the Arcadian glens at noon,
Thy head droop'd softly, and the golden curls
Clustering o'er thy white forehead, like a girl's ;

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The short proud lip showing thy race, thy cheeks
Brown'd with thine open-air, free, hunter's life.
Ah me!
And where dost thou sleep now, my innocent boy?—
In some dark fir-tree's shadow, amid rocks
Untrodden, on Cyllenê's desolate side;
Where travellers never pass, where only come
Wild beasts, and vultures sailing overhead.
There, there thou liest now, my hapless child!
Stretch'd among briars and stones, the slow, black gore
Oozing through thy soak'd hunting-shirt, with limbs
Yet stark from the death-struggle, tight-clench'd hands,
And eyeballs staring for revenge in vain.
Ah miserable!
And thou, thou fair-skinn'd Serpent! thou art laid
In a rich chamber, on a happy bed,
In a king's house, thy victim's heritage;
And drink'st untroubled slumber, to sleep off
The toils of thy foul service, till thou wake
Refresh'd, and claim thy master's thanks and gold.—
Wake up in hell from thine unhallow'd sleep,
Thou smiling Fiend, and claim thy guerdon there!
Wake amid gloom, and howling, and the noise
Of sinners pinion'd on the torturing wheel,

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And the stanch Furies' never-silent scourge.
And bid the chief tormentors there provide
For a grand culprit shortly coming down.
Go thou the first, and usher in thy lord!
A more just stroke than that thou gav'st my son
Take——

[MEROPE *advances towards the sleeping* ÆPYTUS, *with the axe uplifted. At the same moment* ARCAS *re-enters.*

Arcas (*to* THE CHORUS)

Not with him to council did the King
Carry his messenger, but left him here.

[*Sees* MEROPE *and* ÆPYTUS.

O Gods! . . .

Merope

Foolish old man, thou spoil'st my blow!

Arcas

What do I see? . . .

Merope

A murderer at death's door.
Therefore no words!

Arcas

A murderer? . . .

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Merope

And a captive
To the dear next-of-kin of him he murder'd.
Stand, and let vengeance pass !

Arcas

Hold, O Queen, hold !
Thou know'st not whom thou strik'st . . .

Merope

I know his crime.

Arcas

Unhappy one ! thou strik'st——

Merope

A most just blow.

Arcas

No, by the Gods, thou slay'st——

Merope

Stand off !

Arcas

Thy son !

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Merope

Ah ! . . .

[*She lets the axe drop, and falls insensible.*

Æpytus (*awaking*)

Who are these ? What shrill, ear-piercing
scream
Wakes me thus kindly from the perilous sleep
Wherewith fatigue and youth had bound mine
eyes,
Even in the deadly palace of my foe ?—
Arcas ! Thou here ?

Arcas (*embracing him*)

O my dear master ! O
My child, my charge beloved, welcome to life !
As dead we held thee, mourn'd for thee as dead.

Æpytus

In word I died, that I in deed might live.
But who are these ?

Arcas

Messenian maidens, friends.

Æpytus

And, Arcas !—but I tremble !

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Arcas

Boldly ask.

Æpytus

That black-robed, swooning figure? . . .

Arcas

Merope.

Æpytus

O mother! mother!

Merope

Who upbraids me? Ah! . . .
[*seeing the axe.*

Æpytus

Upbraids thee? no one.

Merope

Thou dost well: but take . . .

Æpytus

What wav'st thou off?

Merope

That murderous axe away!

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Æpytus

Thy son is here.

Merope

One said so, sure, but now.

Æpytus

Here, here thou hast him !

Merope

Slaughter'd by this hand ! . . .

Æpytus

No, by the Gods, alive and like to live !

Merope

What, thou ?—I dream——

Æpytus

May'st thou dream ever so !

Merope (*advancing towards him*)

My child ? unhurt ? . . .

Æpytus

Only by over joy.

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Merope

Art thou, then, come? . . .

Æpytus

Never to part again.

[*They fall into one another's arms. Then* MEROPE, *holding* ÆPYTUS *by the hand, turns to* THE CHORUS.

Merope

O kind Messenian maidens, O my friends,
Bear witness, see, mark well, on what a head
My first stroke of revenge had nearly fallen!

The Chorus

We see, dear mistress: and we say, the Gods,
As hitherto they kept him, keep him now.

Merope

O my son! *str.*
I have, I have thee . . . the years
Fly back, my child! and thou seem'st
Ne'er to have gone from these eyes,
Never been torn from this breast.

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Æpytus

Mother, my heart runs over ; but the time
Presses me, chides me, will not let me weep.

Merope

Fearest thou now ?

Æpytus

I fear not, but I think on my design.

Merope

At the undried fount of this breast,
A babe, thou smilest again.
Thy brothers play at my feet,
Early-slain innocents ! near,
Thy kind-speaking father stands.

Æpytus

Remember, to revenge his death I come !

Merope

Ah . . . revenge ! *ant.*
That word ! it kills me ! I see
Once more roll back on my house,
Never to ebb, the accurst
All-flooding ocean of blood.

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Æpytus

Mother, sometimes the justice of the Gods
Appoints the way to peace through shedding
blood.

Merope

Sorrowful peace!

Æpytus

And yet the only peace to us allow'd.

Merope

From the first-wrought vengeance is born
A long succession of crimes.
Fresh blood flows, calling for blood.
Fathers, sons, grandsons, are all
One death-dealing vengeful train.

Æpytus

Mother, thy fears are idle; for I come
To close an old wound, not to open new.
In all else willing to be taught, in this
Instruct me not; I have my lesson clear.—
Arcas, seek out my uncle Laias, now
Conferring in the city with our friends;
Here bring him, ere the King come back from
council.

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That, how to accomplish what the Gods enjoin,
And the slow-ripening time at last prepares,
We two with thee, my mother, may consult ;
For whose help dare I count on, if not thine ?

Merope

Approves my brother Laias this intent ?

Æpytus

Yes, and alone is with me here to share.

Merope

And what of thine Arcadian mate, who bears
Suspicion from thy grandsire of thy death,
For whom, as I suppose, thou passest here ?

Æpytus

Sworn to our plot he is ; if false surmise
Fix him the author of my death, I know not.

Merope

Proof, not surmise, shows him in commerce close——

Æpytus

With this Messenian tyrant—that I know.

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Merope

And entertain'st thou, child, such dangerous friends?

Æpytus

This commerce for my best behoof he plies.

Merope

That thou may'st read thine enemy's counsel plain?

Æpytus

Too dear his secret wiles have cost our house.

Merope

And of his unsure agent what demands he?

Æpytus

News of my business, pastime, temper, friends.

Merope

His messages, then, point not to thy murder?

Æpytus

Not yet, though such, no doubt, his final aim.

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Merope

And what Arcadian helpers bring'st thou here?

Æpytus

Laias alone; no errand mine for crowds.

Merope

On what relying, to crush such a foe?

Æpytus

One sudden stroke, and the Messenians' love.

Merope

O thou long-lost, long seen in dreams alone,
But now seen face to face, my only child!
Why wilt thou fly to lose as soon as found
My new-won treasure, thy belovéd life?
Or how expectest not to lose, who com'st
With such slight means to cope with such a foe?
Thine enemy thou know'st not, nor his strength.
The stroke thou purposest is desperate, rash—
Yet grant that it succeeds—thou hast behind
The stricken King a second enemy
Scarce dangerous less than him, the Dorian lords.
These are not now the savage band who erst
Follow'd thy father from their northern hills,
Mere ruthless and uncounsell'd wolves of war,

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Good to obey, without a leader nought.
Their chief hath train'd them, made them like himself,
Sagacious, men of iron, watchful, firm,
Against surprise and sudden panic proof.
Their master fall'n, these will not flinch, but band
To keep their master's power; thou wilt find
Behind his corpse their hedge of serried spears.
But, to match these, thou hast the people's love?
On what a reed, my child, thou leanest there!
Knowest thou not how timorous, how unsure,
How useless an ally a people is
Against the one and certain arm of power?
Thy father perish'd in this people's cause,
Perish'd before their eyes, yet no man stirr'd!
For years, his widow, in their sight I stand,
A never-changing index to revenge—
What help, what vengeance, at their hands have I?—
At least, if thou wilt trust them, try them first.
Against the King himself array the host
Thou countest on to back thee 'gainst his lords;
First rally the Messenians to thy cause,
Give them cohesion, purpose, and resolve,
Marshal them to an army—then advance,
Then try the issue; and not, rushing on
Single and friendless, give to certain death
That dear-beloved, that young, that gracious head.
Be guided, O my son! spurn counsel not!
For know thou this, a violent heart hath been
Fatal to all the race of Heracles.

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The Chorus

With sage experience she speaks ; and thou,
O Æpytus, weigh well her counsel given.

Æpytus

Ill counsel, in my judgment, gives she here,
Maidens, and reads experience much amiss ;
Discrediting the succour which our cause
Might from the people draw, if rightly used ;
Advising us a course which would, indeed,
If follow'd, make their succour slack and null.
A people is no army, train'd to fight,
A passive engine, at their general's will ;
And, if so used, proves, as thou say'st, unsure.
A people, like a common man, is dull,
Is lifeless, while its heart remains untouch'd ;
A fool can drive it, and a fly may scare.
When it admires and loves, its heart awakes ;
Then irresistibly it lives, it works ;
A people, then, is an ally indeed—
It is ten thousand fiery wills in one.
Now I, if I invite them to run risk
Of life for my advantage, and myself,
Who chiefly profit, run no more than they—
How shall I rouse their love, their ardour so ?
But, if some signal, unassisted stroke,
Dealt at my own sole risk, before their eyes,
Announces me their rightful prince return'd—
The undegenerate blood of Heracles—

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The daring claimant of a perilous throne—
How might not such a sight as this revive
Their loyal passion tow'rd my father's house,
Kindle their hearts, make them no more a mob,
A craven mob, but a devouring fire?
Then might I use them, then, for one who thus
Spares not himself, themselves they will not spare.
Haply, had but one daring soul stood forth
To rally them and lead them to revenge,
When my great father fell, they had replied!
Alas! our foe alone stood forward then.
And thou, my mother, had'st thou made a sign—
Had'st thou, from thy forlorn and captive state
Of widowhood in these polluted halls,
Thy prison-house, raised one imploring cry—
Who knows but that avengers thou hadst found?
But mute thou sat'st, and each Messenian heart
In thy despondency desponded too.
Enough of this!—Though not a finger stir
To succour me in my extremest need;
Though all free spirits in this land were dead,
And only slaves and tyrants left alive;
Yet for me, mother, I had liefer die
On native ground, than drag the tedious hours
Of a protected exile any more.
Hate, duty, interest, passion call one way;
Here stand I now, and the attempt shall be.

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The Chorus

Prudence is on the other side ; but deeds
Condemn'd by prudence have sometimes gone
well.

Merope

Not till the ways of prudence all are tried,
And tried in vain, the turn of rashness comes.
Thou leapest to thy deed, and hast not ask'd
Thy kinsfolk and thy father's friends for aid.

Æpytus

And to what friends should I for aid apply ?

Merope

The royal race of Temenus, in Argos——

Æpytus

That house, like ours, intestine murder maims.

Merope

Thy Spartan cousins, Procles and his brother——

Æpytus

Love a won cause, but not a cause to win.

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Merope

My father, then, and his Arcadian chiefs——

Æpytus

Mean still to keep aloof from Dorian broil.

Merope

Wait, then, until sufficient help appears.

Æpytus

Orestes in Mycenæ had no more.

Merope

He to fulfil an order raised his hand.

Æpytus

What order more precise had he than I?

Merope

Apollo peal'd it from his Delphian cave.

Æpytus

A mother's murder needed hest divine.

Merope

He had a hest, at least, and thou hast none.

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Æpytus

The Gods command not where the heart speaks clear.

Merope

Thou wilt destroy, I see, thyself and us.

Æpytus

O suffering ! O calamity ! how ten,
How twentyfold worse are ye, when your blows
Not only wound the sense, but kill the soul,
The noble thought, which is alone the man !
That I, to-day returning, find myself
Orphan'd of both my parents—by his foes
My father, by your strokes my mother slain !
For this is not my mother, who dissuades,
At the dread altar of her husband's tomb,
His son from vengeance on his murderer ;
And not alone dissuades him, but compares
His just revenge to an unnatural deed,
A deed so awful, that the general tongue
Fluent of horrors, falters to relate it—
Of darkness so tremendous, that its author,
Though to his act empower'd, nay, impell'd,
By the oracular sentence of the Gods,
Fled, for years after, o'er the face of earth,
A frenzied wanderer, a God-driven man,
And hardly yet, some say, hath found a grave—
With such a deed as *this* thou matchest mine,

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Which Nature sanctions, which the innocent
blood
Clamours to find fulfill'd, which good men praise,
And only bad men joy to see undone!
O honour'd father! hide thee in thy grave
Deep as thou canst, for hence no succour comes;
Since from thy faithful subjects what revenge
Canst thou expect, when thus thy widow fails?
Alas! an adamantine strength indeed,
Past expectation, hath thy murderer built;
For this is the true strength of guilty kings,
When they corrupt the souls of those they rule.

The Chorus

Zeal makes him most unjust; but, in good time,
Here, as I guess, the noble Laias comes.

[*Laias comes in.*

Laias

Break off, break off your talking, and depart
Each to his post, where the occasion calls;
Lest from the council-chamber presently
The King return, and find you prating here.
A time will come for greetings; but to-day
The hour for words is gone, is come for deeds.

Æpytus

O princely Laias! to what purpose calls
The occasion, if our chief confederate fails?
My mother stands aloof, and blames our deed.

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Laias

My royal sister? . . . but, without some cause,
I know, she honours not the dead so ill.

Merope

Brother, it seems thy sister must present,
At this first meeting after absence long,
Not welcome, exculpation to her kin;
Yet exculpation needs it, if I seek,
A woman and a mother, to avert
Risk from my new-restored, my only son?—
Sometimes, when he was gone, I wish'd him back,
Risk what he might; now that I have him here,
Now that I feed mine eyes on that young face,
Hear that fresh voice, and clasp that gold-lock'd head,
I shudder, Laias, to commit my child
To murder's dread arena, where I saw
His father and his ill-starr'd brethren fall!
I loathe for him the slippery way of blood;
I ask if bloodless means may gain his end.
In me the fever of revengeful hate,
Passion's first furious longing to imbrue
Our own right hand in the detested blood
Of enemies, and count their dying groans—
If in this feeble bosom such a fire
Did ever burn—is long by time allay'd,
And I would now have Justice strike, not me.
Besides—for from my brother and my son

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I hide not even this—the reverence deep,
Remorseful, tow'rd my hostile solitude,
By Polyphontes never fail'd-in once
Through twenty years; his mournful anxious zeal
To efface in me the memory of his crime—
Though it efface not that, yet makes me wish
His death a public, not a personal act,
Treacherously plotted 'twixt my son and me;
To whom this day he came to proffer peace,
Treaty, and to this kingdom for my son
Heirship, with fair intent, as I believe.—
For that he plots thy death, account it false;

(*To* ÆPYTUS)

Number it with the thousand rumours vain,
Figments of plots, wherewith intriguers fill
The enforcéd leisure of an exile's ear.
Immersed in serious state-craft is the King,
Bent above all to pacify, to rule,
Rigidly, yet in settled calm, this realm;
Not prone, all say, averse to bloodshed now.—
So much is due to truth, even tow'rds our foe.

(*To* LAIAS)

Do I, then, give to usurpation grace,
And from his natural rights my son debar?
Not so! let him—and none shall be more prompt
Than I to help—raise his Messenian friends;
Let him fetch succours from Arcadia, gain
His Argive or his Spartan cousins' aid;
Let him do this, do aught but recommence

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Murder's uncertain, secret, perilous game—
And I, when to his righteous standard down
Flies Victory wing'd, and Justice raises *then*
Her sword, will be the first to bid it fall.
If, haply, at this moment, such attempt
Promise not fair, let him a little while
Have faith, and trust the future and the Gods.
He may ; for never did the Gods allow
Fast permanence to an ill-gotten throne.—
These are but woman's words—yet, Laias, thou
Despise them not ! for, brother, thou and I
Were not among the feuds of warrior-chiefs,
Each sovereign for his dear-bought hour, born ;
But in the pastoral Arcadia rear'd,
With Cypselus our father, where we saw
The simple patriarchal state of kings,
Where sire to son transmits the unquestion'd crown,
Unhack'd, unsmirch'd, unbloodied, and have learnt
That spotless hands unshaken sceptres hold.
Having learnt this, then, use thy knowledge now.

The Chorus

Which way to lean I know not : bloody strokes
Are never free from doubt, though sometimes due.

Laias

O Merope, the common heart of man
Agrees to deem some deeds so dark in guilt,

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That neither gratitude, nor tie of race,
Womanly pity, nor maternal fear,
Nor any pleader else, shall be indulged
To breathe a syllable to bar revenge.
All this, no doubt, thou to thyself hast urged—
Time presses, so that theme forbear I now;
Direct to thy dissuasions I reply.
Blood-founded thrones, thou say'st, are insecure;
Our father's kingdom, because pure, is safe.
True; but what cause to our Arcadia gives
Its privileged immunity from blood,
But that, since first the black and fruitful Earth
In the primeval mountain-forests bore
Pelasgus, our forefather and mankind's,
Legitimately sire to son, with us,
Bequeaths the allegiance of our shepherd-tribes,
More loyal, as our line continues more?—
How can your Heracleidan chiefs inspire
This awe which guards our earth-sprung, lineal kings?
What permanence, what stability like ours,
Whether blood flows or no, can yet invest
The broken order of your Dorian thrones,
Fix'd yesterday, and ten times changed since then?—
Two brothers, and their orphan nephews, strove
For the three conquer'd kingdoms of this isle;
The eldest, mightiest brother, Temenus, took
Argos; a juggle to Cresphontes gave

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Messenia ; to those helpless Boys, the lot
Worst of the three, the stony Sparta, fell.
August, indeed, was the foundation here !
What follow'd ?—His most trusted kinsman slew
Cresphontes in Messenia ; Temenus
Perish'd in Argos by his jealous sons ;
The Spartan Brothers with their guardian strive.
Can houses thus ill-seated, thus embroil'd,
Thus little founded in their subjects' love,
Practise the indulgent, bloodless policy
Of dynasties long-fix'd, and honour'd long ?
No ! Vigour and severity must chain
Popular reverence to these recent lines.
Be their first-founded order strict maintain'd—
Their murder'd rulers terribly avenged—
Ruthlessly their rebellious subjects crush'd !
Since policy bids thus, what fouler death
Than thine illustrious husband's to avenge
Shall we select ? than Polyphontes, what
More daring and more grand offender find ?
Justice, my sister, long demands this blow,
And Wisdom, now thou see'st, demands it too.
To strike it, then, dissuade thy son no more ;
For to live disobedient to these two,
Justice and Wisdom, is no life at all.

The Chorus

The Gods, O mistress dear ! the hard-soul'd man,
Who spared not others, bid not us to spare.

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Merope

Alas ! against my brother, son, and friends,
One, and a woman, how can I prevail ?—
O brother, thou hast conquer'd ; yet, I fear !
Son ! with a doubting heart thy mother yields ;
May it turn happier than my doubts portend !

Laias

Meantime on thee the task of silence only
Shall be imposed ; to us shall be the deed.
Now, not another word, but to our act !
Nephew ! thy friends are sounded, and prove true.
Thy father's murderer, in the public place,
Performs, this noon, a solemn sacrifice ;
Be with him—choose the moment—strike thy blow !
If prudence counsels thee to go unarm'd,
The sacrificer's axe will serve thy turn.
To me and the Messenians leave the rest,
With the Gods' aid—and, if they give but aid
As our just cause deserves, I do not fear.

[ÆPYTUS, LAIAS, *and* ARCAS *go out.*

The Chorus

O Son and Mother, *str.* 1.
Whom the Gods o'ershadow,
In dangerous trial,

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With certainty of favour !
As erst they shadow'd
Your race's founders
From irretrievable woe;
When the seed of Lycaon
Lay forlorn, lay outcast,
Callisto and her Boy.

What deep-grass'd meadow *ant.* 1.
At the meeting valleys—
Where clear-flowing Ladon,
Most beautiful of waters,
Receives the river
Whose trout are vocal,
The Aroanian stream—
Without home, without mother,
Hid the babe, hid Arcas,
The nursling of the dells ?

But the sweet-smelling myrtle, *str.* 2
And the pink-flower'd oleander,
And the green agnus-castus,
To the west-wind's murmur,
Rustled round his cradle ;
And Maia rear'd him.
Then, a boy, he startled,
In the snow-fill'd hollows
Of high Cyllenê,
The white mountain-birds ;
Or surprised, in the glens,
The basking tortoises,

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Whose striped shell founded
In the hand of Hermes
The glory of the lyre.

But his mother, Callisto, *ant.* 2.
In her hiding-place of the thickets
Of the lentisk and ilex,
In her rough form, fearing
The hunter on the outlook,
Poor changeling! trembled.
Or the children, plucking
In the thorn-choked gullies
Wild gooseberries, scared her,
The shy mountain-bear!
Or the shepherds, on slopes
With pale-spiked lavender
And crisp thyme tufted,
Came upon her, stealing
At day-break through the dew.

Once, 'mid those gorges, *str.* 3.
Spray-drizzled, lonely,
Unclimb'd of man—
O'er whose cliffs the townsmen
Of crag-perch'd Nonacris
Behold in summer
The slender torrent
Of Styx come dancing,
A wind-blown thread—
By the precipices of Khelmos,
The fleet, desperate hunter,

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The youthful Arcas, born of Zeus,
His fleeing mother,
Transform'd Callisto,
Unwitting follow'd—
And raised his spear.

Turning, with piteous, *ant.* 3.
Distressful longing,
Sad, eager eyes,
Mutely she regarded
Her well-known enemy.
Low moans half utter'd
What speech refused her;
Tears coursed, tears human,
Down those disfigured,
Once human cheeks.
With unutterable foreboding
Her son, heart-stricken, eyed her.
The Gods had pity, made them Stars.
Stars now they sparkle
In the northern Heaven—
The guard Arcturus,
The guard-watch'd Bear.

So, o'er thee and thy child, *epode.*
Some God, Merope, now,
In dangerous hour, stretches his hand.
So, like a star, dawns thy son,
Radiant with fortune and joy.

[POLYPHONTES *comes in.*

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Polyphontes

O Merope, the trouble on thy face
Tells me enough thou know'st the news which all
Messenia speaks! the prince, thy son, is dead.
Not from my lips should consolation fall;
To offer that, I come not; but to urge,
Even after news of this sad death, our league.
Yes, once again I come; I will not take
This morning's angry answer for thy last.
To the Messenian kingdom thou and I
Are the sole claimants left; what cause of strife
Lay in thy son is buried in his grave.
Most honourably I meant, I call the Gods
To witness, offering him return and power;
Yet, had he lived, suspicion, jealousy,
Inevitably had surged up, perhaps,
'Twixt thee and me—suspicion, that I nursed
Some ill design against him; jealousy,
That he enjoy'd but part, being heir to all.
And he himself, with the impetuous heart
Of youth, 'tis like, had never quite forgone
The thought of vengeance on me, never quite
Unclosed his itching fingers from his sword.
But thou, O Merope, though deeply wrong'd,
Though injured past forgiveness, as men deem,
Yet hast been long at school with thoughtful time,
And from that teacher may'st have learn'd, like me,

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That all may be endured, and all forgiv'n—
Have learn'd, that we must sacrifice the bent
Of personal feeling to the public weal—
Have learn'd, that there are guilty deeds, which leave
The hand that does them guiltless; in a word,
That kings live for their peoples, not themselves.
This having known, let us a union found
(For the last time I ask, ask earnestly)
Based on pure public welfare; let us be
Not Merope and Polyphontes, foes
Blood-sever'd, but Messenia's King and Queen!
Let us forget ourselves for those we rule!
Speak! I go hence to offer sacrifice
To the Preserver Zeus; let me return
Thanks to him for our amity as well.

Merope

Oh had'st thou, Polyphontes, still but kept
The silence thou hast kept for twenty years!

Polyphontes

Henceforth, if what I urge displease, I may.
But fair proposal merits fair reply.

Merope

And thou shalt have it! Yes, because thou *hast*
For twenty years forborne to interrupt

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The solitude of her whom thou hast wrong'd—
That scanty grace shall earn thee this reply.—
First, for our union. Trust me, 'twixt us two
The brazen-footed Fury ever stalks,
Waving her hundred hands, a torch in each,
Aglow with angry fire, to keep us twain.
Now, for thyself. Thou com'st with well-cloak'd joy,
To announce the ruin of my husband's house,
To sound thy triumph in his widow's ears,
To bid her share thine unendanger'd throne.
To this thou would'st have answer. Take it: Fly! . . .
Cut short thy triumph, seeming at its height;
Fling off thy crown, supposed at last secure;
Forsake this ample, proud Messenian realm;
To some small, humble, and unnoted strand,
Some rock more lonely than that Lemnian isle
Where Philoctetes pined, take ship and flee!
Some solitude more inaccessible
Than the ice-bastion'd Caucasian Mount
Chosen a prison for Prometheus, climb!
There in unvoiced oblivion sink thy name,
And bid the sun, thine only visitant,
Divulge not to the far-off world of men
What once-famed wretch he there did espy hid.
There nurse a late remorse, and thank the Gods,
And thank thy bitterest foe, that, having lost
All things but life, thou lose not life as well.

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Polyphontes

What mad bewilderment of grief is this ?

Merope

Thou art bewilder'd ; the sane head is mine.

Polyphontes

I pity thee, and wish thee calmer mind.

Merope

Pity thyself ; none needs compassion more.

Polyphontes

Yet, oh ! could'st thou but act as reason bids !

Merope

And in my turn I wish the same for thee.

Polyphontes

All I could do to soothe thee has been tried.

Merope

For that, in this my warning, thou art paid.

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Polyphontes

Know'st thou then aught, that thus thou sound'st the alarm?

Merope

Thy crime! that were enough to make one fear.

Polyphontes

My deed is of old date, and long atoned.

Merope

Atoned this very day, perhaps, it is.

Polyphontes

My final victory proves the Gods appeased.

Merope

O victor, victor, trip not at the goal!

Polyphontes

Hatred and passionate envy blind thine eyes.

Merope

O Heaven-abandon'd wretch, that envies thee!

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Polyphontes

Thou hold'st so cheap, then, the Messenian crown ?

Merope

I think on what the future hath in store.

Polyphontes

To-day I reign ; the rest I leave to Fate.

Merope

For Fate thou wait'st not long ; since, in this hour—

Polyphontes

What ? for so far Fate hath not proved my foe—

Merope

Fate seals my lips, and drags to ruin thee.

Polyphontes

Enough ! enough ! I will no longer hear
The ill-boding note which frantic hatred sounds
To affright a fortune which the Gods secure.
Once more my friendship thou rejectest ; well !
More for this land's sake grieve I, than mine own.
I chafe not with thee, that thy hate endures,
Nor bend myself too low, to make it yield.

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What I have done is done ; by my own deed,
Neither exulting nor ashamed, I stand.
Why should this heart of mine set mighty store
By the construction and report of men ?
Not men's good word hath made me what I am.
Alone I master'd power ; and alone,
Since so thou wilt, I dare maintain it still.

[POLYPHONTES *goes out.*

The Chorus

Did I then waver *str.* 1.
(O woman's judgment !)
Misled by seeming
Success of crime ?
And ask, if sometimes
The Gods, perhaps, allow'd you,
O lawless daring of the strong,
O self-will recklessly indulged ?

Not time, not lightning, *ant.* 1.
Not rain, not thunder,
Efface the endless
Decrees of Heaven—
Make Justice alter,
Revoke, assuage her sentence,
Which dooms dread ends to dreadful deeds,
And violent deaths to violent men.

But the signal example *str.* 2.
Of invariableness of justice

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Our glorious founder
Heracles gave us,
Son loved of Zeus his father—for he sinn'd,

And the strand of Eubœa, *ant. 2.*
And the promontory of Cenæum,
His painful, solemn
Punishment witness'd,
Beheld his expiation—for he died.

O villages of Œta *str. 3.*
With hedges of the wild rose!
O pastures of the mountain,
Of short grass, beaded with dew,
Between the pine-woods and the cliffs!
O cliffs, left by the eagles,
On that morn, when the smoke-cloud
From the oak-built, fiercely-burning pyre,
Up the precipices of Trachis,
Drove them screaming from their eyries!
A willing, a willing sacrifice on that day
Ye witness'd, ye mountain lawns,
When the shirt-wrapt, poison-blister'd Hero
Ascended, with undaunted heart,
Living, his own funeral-pile,
And stood, shouting for a fiery torch;
And the kind, chance-arrived Wanderer,[8]
The inheritor of the bow,
Coming swiftly through the sad Trachinians,
Put the torch to the pile,
That the flame tower'd on high to the Heaven;

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Bearing with it, to Olympus,
To the side of Hebe,
To immortal delight,
The labour-released Hero.

O heritage of Neleus, *ant.* 3.
Ill-kept by his infirm heirs!
O kingdom of Messenê,
Of rich soil, chosen by craft,
Possess'd in hatred, lost in blood!
O town, high Stenyclaros,
With new walls, which the victors
From the four-town'd, mountain-shadow'd Doris,
For their Heracles-issued princes
Built in strength against the vanquish'd!
Another, another sacrifice on this day
Ye witness, ye new-built towers!
When the white-robed, garland-crowned
Monarch
Approaches, with undoubting heart,
Living, his own sacrifice-block,
And stands, shouting for a slaughterous axe;
And the stern, destiny-brought Stranger,
The inheritor of the realm,
Coming swiftly through the jocund Dorians,
Drives the axe to its goal.
That the blood rushes in streams to the dust;
Bearing with it, to Erinnys,
To the Gods of Hades,
To the dead unavenged,
The fiercely-required Victim.

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Knowing he did it, unknowing pays for it. *epode.*
Unknowing, unknowing,
Thinking atoned-for
Deeds unatonable,
Thinking appeased
Gods unappeasable,
Lo, the ill-fated one,
Standing for harbour
Right at the harbour-mouth
Strikes with all sail set
Full on the sharp-pointed
Needle of ruin !

[*A* MESSENGER *comes in.*

Messenger

O honour'd Queen, O faithful followers
Of your dead master's line, I bring you news
To make the gates of this long-mournful house
Leap, and fly open of themselves for joy !

[*Noise and shouting heard.*

Hark how the shouting crowds tramp hitherward
With glad acclaim ! Ere they forestall my news,
Accept it :—Polyphontes is no more.

Merope

Is my son safe ? that question bounds my care.

Messenger

He is, and by the people hail'd for king.

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Merope

The rest to me is little ; yet, since that
Must from some mouth be heard, relate it thou.

Messenger

Not little, if thou saw'st what love, what zeal,
At thy dead husband's name the people show.
For when this morning in the public square
I took my stand, and saw the unarm'd crowds
Of citizens in holiday attire,
Women and children intermix'd ; and then,
Group'd around Zeus's altar, all in arms,
Serried and grim, the ring of Dorian lords—
I trembled for our prince and his attempt.
Silence and expectation held us all ;
Till presently the King came forth, in robe
Of sacrifice, his guards clearing the way
Before him—at his side, the prince, thy son,
Unarm'd and travel-soil'd, just as he was.
With him conferring the King slowly reach'd
The altar in the middle of the square,
Where, by the sacrificing minister,
The flower-dress'd victim stood — a milk-white bull,
Swaying from side to side his massy head
With short impatient lowings. There he stopp'd,
And seem'd to muse awhile, then raised his eyes
To heaven, and laid his hand upon the steer,

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And cried: *O Zeus, let what blood-guiltiness*
Yet stains our land be by this blood wash'd out,
And grant henceforth to the Messenians peace!
That moment, while with upturn'd eyes he pray'd,
The prince snatch'd from the sacrificer's hand
The axe, and on the forehead of the King,
Where twines the chaplet, dealt a mighty blow
Which fell'd him to the earth, and o'er him stood,
And shouted: *Since by thee defilement came,*
What blood so meet as thine to wash it out?
What hand to strike thee meet as mine, the hand
Of Æpytus, thy murder'd master's son?—
But, gazing at him from the ground, the King . . .
Is it, then, thou? he murmur'd; and with that,
He bow'd his head, and deeply groan'd, and died.
Till then we all seem'd stone, but then a cry
Broke from the Dorian lords; forward they rush'd
To circle the prince round—when suddenly
Laias in arms sprang to his nephew's side,
Crying: *O ye Messenians, will ye leave*
The son to perish as ye left the sire?
And from that moment I saw nothing clear;
For from all sides a deluge, as it seem'd
Burst o'er the altar and the Dorian lords,
Of holiday-clad citizens transform'd
To armed warriors;—I heard vengeful cries,
I heard the clash of weapons; then I saw
The Dorians lying dead, thy son hail'd king.

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And, truly, one who sees, what seem'd so strong,
The power of this tyrant and his lords,
Melt like a passing smoke, a nightly dream,
At one bold word, one enterprising blow—
Might ask, why we endured their yoke so long;
But that we know how every perilous feat
Of daring, easy as it seems when done,
Is easy at no moment but the right.

The Chorus

Thou speakest well; but here, to give our eyes
Authentic proof of what thou tell'st our ears,
The conquerors, with the King's dead body, come.

[ÆPYTUS, LAIAS, *and* ARCAS *come in with the dead body of* POLYPHONTES, *followed by a crowd of the* MESSENIANS.

Laias

Sister, from this day forth thou art no more
The widow of a husband unavenged,
The anxious mother of an exiled son.
Thine enemy is slain, thy son is king!
Rejoice with us! and trust me, he who wish'd
Welfare to the Messenian state, and calm,
Could find no way to found them sure as this.

Æpytus

Mother, all these approve me; but if thou
Approve not too, I have but half my joy.

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Merope

O Æpytus, my son, behold, behold
This iron man, my enemy and thine,
This politic sovereign, lying at our feet,
With blood-bespatter'd robes, and chaplet shorn!
Inscrutable as ever, see, it keeps
Its sombre aspect of majestic care,
Of solitary thought, unshared resolve,
Even in death, that countenance austere!
So look'd he, when to Stenyclaros first,
A new-made wife, I from Arcadia came,
And found him at my husband's side, his friend,
His kinsman, his right hand in peace and war,
Unsparing in his service of his toil,
His blood—to me, for I confess it, kind;
So look'd he in that dreadful day of death;
So, when he pleaded for our league but now.
What meantest thou, O Polyphontes, what
Desired'st thou, what truly spurr'd thee on?
Was policy of state, the ascendency
Of the Heracleidan conquerors, as thou said'st,
Indeed thy lifelong passion and sole aim?
Or did'st thou but, as cautious schemers use,
Cloak thine ambition with these specious words?
I know not; just, in either case, the stroke
Which laid thee low, for blood requires blood;
But yet, not knowing this, I triumph not
Over thy corpse—triumph not, neither mourn,—
For I find worth in thee, and badness too.
What mood of spirit, therefore, shall we call

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The true one of a man—what way of life
His fix'd condition and perpetual walk ?
None, since a twofold colour reigns in all.
But thou, my son, study to make prevail
One colour in thy life, the hue of truth ;
That justice, that sage order, not alone
Natural vengeance, may maintain thine act,
And make it stand indeed the will of Heaven.
Thy father's passion was this people's ease,
This people's anarchy, thy foe's pretence.
As the chiefs rule, my son, the people are.
Unhappy people, where the chiefs themselves
Are, like the mob, vicious and ignorant !
So rule, that even thine enemies may fail
To find in thee a fault whereon to found,
Of tyrannous harshness, or remissness weak—
So rule, that as thy father thou be loved !
So rule, that as his foe thou be obey'd !
Take these, my son, over thine enemy's corpse
Thy mother's prayers ! and this prayer last of all :
That even in thy victory thou show,
Mortal, the moderation of a man.

Æpytus

O mother, my best diligence shall be
In all by thy experience to be ruled
Where my own youth falls short ! But, Laias,
now,
First work after such victory, let us go
To render to my true Messenians thanks,

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To the Gods grateful sacrifice; and then,
Assume the ensigns of my father's power.

The Chorus

Son of Cresphontes, past what perils
Com'st thou, guided safe, to thy home!
What things daring! what enduring!
And all this by the will of the Gods.

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EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA

A DRAMATIC POEM

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PERSONS

EMPEDOCLES.
PAUSANIAS, *a Physician.*
CALLICLES, *a young Harp-player.*

The Scene of the Poem is on Mount Etna; at first in the forest region, afterwards on the summit of the mountain.

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EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA

ACT I. SCENE I

Morning. A Pass in the forest region of Etna.

CALLICLES

(*Alone, resting on a rock by the path*)

THE mules, I think, will not be here this hour ;
They feel the cool wet turf under their feet
By the stream-side, after the dusty lanes
In which they have toil'd all night from Catana,
And scarcely will they budge a yard. O Pan,
How gracious is the mountain at this hour !
A thousand times have I been here alone,
Or with the revellers from the mountain-towns,
But never on so fair a morn ;—the sun
Is shining on the brilliant mountain-crests,
And on the highest pines ; but farther down,
Here in the valley, is in shade ; the sward
Is dark, and on the stream the mist still hangs ;
One sees one's footprints crush'd in the wet grass,
One's breath curls in the air ; and on these pines

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That climb from the stream's edge, the long grey tufts,
Which the goats love, are jewell'd thick with dew.
Here will I stay till the slow litter comes.
I have my harp too—that is well.—Apollo!
What mortal could be sick or sorry here?
I know not in what mind Empedocles,
Whose mules I follow'd, may be coming up,
But if, as most men say, he is half mad
With exile, and with brooding on his wrongs,
Pausanias, his sage friend, who mounts with him,
Could scarce have lighted on a lovelier cure.
The mules must be below, far down. I hear
Their tinkling bells, mix'd with the song of birds,
Rise faintly to me—now it stops!—Who's here?
Pausanias! and on foot? alone?

Pausanias

And thou, then?
I left thee supping with Peisianax,
With thy head full of wine, and thy hair crown'd,
Touching thy harp as the whim came on thee,
And praised and spoil'd by master and by guests
Almost as much as the new dancing-girl.
Why hast thou follow'd us?

Callicles

The night was hot,
And the feast past its prime; so we slipp'd out,

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Some of us, to the portico to breathe ;—
Peisianax, thou know'st, drinks late ;—and then,
As I was lifting my soil'd garland off,
I saw the mules and litter in the court,
And in the litter sate Empedocles ;
Thou, too, wast with him. Straightway I sped
home ;
I saddled my white mule, and all night long
Through the cool lovely country follow'd you,
Pass'd you a little since as morning dawn'd,
And have this hour sate by the torrent here,
Till the slow mules should climb in sight again.
And now ?

Pausanias

And now, back to the town with speed !
Crouch in the wood first, till the mules have
pass'd ;
They do but halt, they will be here anon.
Thou must be viewless to Empedocles ;
Save mine, he must not meet a human eye.
One of his moods is on him that thou know'st ;
I think, thou would'st not vex him.

Callicles

No—and yet
I would fain stay, and help thee tend him. Once
He knew me well, and would oft notice me ;
And still, I know not how, he draws me to him,

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And I could watch him with his proud sad face,
His flowing locks and gold-encircled brow
And kingly gait, for ever ; such a spell
In his severe looks, such a majesty
As drew of old the people after him,
In Agrigentum and Olympia,
When his star reign'd, before his banishment,
Is potent still on me in his decline.
But oh ! Pausanias, he is changed of late ;
There is a settled trouble in his air
Admits no momentary brightening now,
And when he comes among his friends at feasts,
'Tis as an orphan among prosperous boys.
Thou know'st of old he loved this harp of mine,
When first he sojourn'd with Peisianax ;
He is now always moody, and I fear him ;
But I would serve him, soothe him, if I could,
Dared one but try.

Pausanias

Thou wast a kind child ever !
He loves thee, but he must not see thee now.
Thou hast indeed a rare touch on thy harp,
He loves that in thee, too ;—there was a time
(But that is pass'd), he would have paid thy strain
With music to have drawn the stars from heaven.
He hath his harp and laurel with him still,
But he has laid the use of music by,
And all which might relax his settled gloom.
Yet thou may'st try thy playing, if thou wilt—

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But thou must keep unseen ; follow us on,
But at a distance ! in these solitudes,
In this clear mountain-air, a voice will rise,
Though from afar, distinctly ; it may soothe him.
Play when we halt, and, when the evening comes
And I must leave him (for his pleasure is
To be left musing these soft nights alone
In the high unfrequented mountain-spots),
Then watch him, for he ranges swift and far,
Sometimes to Etna's top, and to the cone ;
But hide thee in the rocks a great way down,
And try thy noblest strains, my Callicles,
With the sweet night to help thy harmony !
Thou wilt earn my thanks sure, and perhaps his.

Callicles

More than a day and night, Pausanias,
Of this fair summer-weather, on these hills,
Would I bestow to help Empedocles.
That needs no thanks ; one is far better here
Than in the broiling city in these heats.
But tell me, how hast thou persuaded him
In this his present fierce, man-hating mood,
To bring thee out with him alone on Etna ?

Pausanias

Thou hast heard all men speaking of Pantheia,
The woman who at Agrigentum lay
Thirty long days in a cold trance of death,

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And whom Empedocles call'd back to life.
Thou art too young to note it, but his power
Swells with the swelling evil of this time,
And holds men mute to see where it will rise.
He could stay swift diseases in old days,
Chain madmen by the music of his lyre,
Cleanse to sweet airs the breath of poisonous streams,
And in the mountain-chinks inter the winds.
This he could do of old ; but now, since all
Clouds and grows daily worse in Sicily,
Since broils tear us in twain, since this new swarm
Of sophists has got empire in our schools
Where he was paramount, since he is banish'd
And lives a lonely man in triple gloom—
He grasps the very reins of life and death.
I ask'd him of Pantheia yesterday,
When we were gather'd with Peisianax,
And he made answer, I should come at night
On Etna here, and be alone with him,
And he would tell me, as his old, tried friend,
Who still was faithful, what might profit me ;
That is, the secret of this miracle.

Callicles

Bah ! Thou a doctor ! Thou art superstitious.
Simple Pausanias, 'twas no miracle !
Pantheia, for I know her kinsmen well,
Was subject to these trances from a girl.

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Empedocles would say so, did he deign ;
But he still lets the people, whom he scorns,
Gape and cry *wizard* at him, if they list.
But thou, thou art no company for him !
Thou art as cross, as sour'd as himself !
Thou hast some wrong from thine own citizens,
And then thy friend is banish'd, and on that,
Straightway thou fallest to arraign the times,
As if the sky was impious not to fall.
The sophists are no enemies of his ;
I hear, Gorgias, their chief, speaks nobly of him,
As of his gifted master, and once friend.
He is too scornful, too high-wrought, too bitter.
'Tis not the times, 'tis not the sophists vex him ;
There is some root of suffering in himself,
Some secret and unfollow'd vein of woe,
Which makes the time look black and sad to him.
Pester him not in this his sombre mood
With questionings about an idle tale,
But lead him through the lovely mountain-paths,
And keep his mind from preying on itself,
And talk to him of things at hand and common,
Not miracles ! thou art a learned man,
But credulous of fables as a girl.

Pausanias

And thou, a boy whose tongue outruns his knowledge,
And on whose lightness blame is thrown away.

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Enough of this ! I see the litter wind
Up by the torrent-side, under the pines.
I must rejoin Empedocles. Do thou
Crouch in the brushwood till the mules have pass'd ;
Then play thy kind part well. Farewell till night !

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SCENE II

Noon. A Glen on the highest skirts of the woody region of Etna

EMPEDOCLES. PAUSANIAS

Pausanias

The noon is hot. When we have cross'd the stream,
We shall have left the woody tract, and come
Upon the open shoulder of the hill.
See how the giant spires of yellow bloom
Of the sun-loving gentian, in the heat,
Are shining on those naked slopes like flame!
Let us rest here; and now, Empedocles,
Pantheia's history!

[*A harp-note below is heard.*

Empedocles

Hark! what sound was that
Rose from below? If it were possible,
And we were not so far from human haunt,
I should have said that some one touch'd a harp.
Hark! there again!

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Pausanias

'Tis the boy Callicles,
The sweetest harp-player in Catana.
He is for ever coming on these hills,
In summer, to all country-festivals,
With a gay revelling band ; he breaks from them
Sometimes, and wanders far among the glens.
But heed him not, he will not mount to us ;
I spoke with him this morning. Once more, therefore,
Instruct me of Pantheia's story, Master,
As I have pray'd thee.

Empedocles

That ? and to what end ?

Pausanias

It is enough that all men speak of it.
But I will also say, that when the Gods
Visit us as they do with sign and plague,
To know those spells of thine which stay their hand
Were to live free from terror.

Empedocles

Spells ? Mistrust them !
Mind is the spell which governs earth and heaven.

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Man has a mind with which to plan his safety ;
Know that, and help thyself !

Pausanias

But thine own words ?
'The wit and counsel of man was never clear,
Troubles confound the little wit he has.'
Mind is a light which the Gods mock us with,
To lead those false who trust it.

[*The harp sounds again.*

Empedocles

Hist ! once more !
Listen, Pausanias !—Ay, 'tis Callicles ;
I know these notes among a thousand. Hark !

Callicles

(*Sings unseen, from below*)

The track winds down to the clear stream,
To cross the sparkling shallows ; there
The cattle love to gather, on their way
To the high mountain-pastures, and to stay,
Till the rough cow-herds drive them past,
Knee-deep in the cool ford ; for 'tis the last
Of all the woody, high, well-water'd dells
On Etna ; and the beam
Of noon is broken there by chestnut-boughs

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Down its steep verdant sides ; the air
Is freshen'd by the leaping stream, which throws
Eternal showers of spray on the moss'd roots
Of trees, and veins of turf, and long dark shoots
Of ivy-plants, and fragrant hanging bells
Of hyacinths, and on late anemonies,
That muffle its wet banks ; but glade,
And stream, and sward, and chestnut-trees,
End here ; Etna beyond, in the broad glare
Of the hot noon, without a shade,
Slope behind slope, up to the peak, lies bare ;
The peak, round which the white clouds play.

In such a glen, on such a day,
On Pelion, on the grassy ground,
Chiron, the aged Centaur lay,
The young Achilles standing by.
The Centaur taught him to explore
The mountains ; where the glens are dry
And the tired Centaurs come to rest,
And where the soaking springs abound
And the straight ashes grow for spears,
And where the hill-goats come to feed,
And the sea-eagles build their nest.
He show'd him Phthia far away,
And said : O boy, I taught this lore
To Peleus, in long distant years !
He told him of the Gods, the stars,
The tides ;—and then of mortal wars,
And of the life which heroes lead
Before they reach the Elysian place

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And rest in the immortal mead ;
And all the wisdom of his race.

The music below ceases, and EMPEDOCLES *speaks, accompanying himself in a solemn manner on his harp.*

The out-spread world to span
A cord the Gods first slung,
And then the soul of man
There, like a mirror, hung,
And bade the winds through space impel the gusty toy.

Hither and thither spins
The wind-borne, mirroring soul,
A thousand glimpses wins,
And never sees a whole ;
Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves its last employ.

The Gods laugh in their sleeve
To watch man doubt and fear,
Who knows not what to believe
Since he sees nothing clear,
And dares stamp nothing false where he finds nothing sure.

Is this, Pausanias, so ?
And can our souls not strive,

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But with the winds must go,
And hurry where they drive?
Is fate indeed so strong, man's strength indeed so poor?

I will not judge. That man,
Howbeit, I judge as lost,
Whose mind allows a plan,
Which would degrade it most;
And he treats doubt the best who tries to see least ill.

Be not, then, fear's blind slave!
Thou art my friend; to thee,
All knowledge that I have,
All skill I wield, are free.
Ask not the latest news of the last miracle,

Ask not what days and nights
In trance Pantheia lay,
But ask how thou such sights
May'st see without dismay;
Ask what most helps when known, thou son of Anchitus!

What? hate, and awe, and shame
Fill thee to see our time;
Thou feelest thy soul's frame
Shaken and out of chime?
What? life and chance go hard with thee too, as with us;

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Thy citizens, 'tis said,
Envy thee and oppress,
Thy goodness no men aid,
All strive to make it less ;
Tyranny, pride, and lust, fill Sicily's abodes ;

Heaven is with earth at strife,
Signs make thy soul afraid,
The dead return to life,
Rivers are dried, winds stay'd ;
Scarce can one think in calm, so threatening are the Gods ;

And we feel, day and night,
The burden of ourselves—
Well, then, the wiser wight
In his own bosom delves,
And asks what ails him so, and gets what cure he can.

The sophist sneers : Fool, take
Thy pleasure, right or wrong.
The pious wail : Forsake
A world these sophists throng..
Be neither saint nor sophist-led, but be a man !

These hundred doctors try
To preach thee to their school.
We have the truth ! they cry ;
And yet their oracle,
Trumpet it as they will, is but the same as thine.

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Once read thy own breast right,
And thou hast done with fears ;
Man gets no other light,
Search he a thousand years.
Sink in thyself ! there ask what ails thee, at that shrine !

What makes thee struggle and rave ?
Why are men ill at ease ?—
'Tis that the lot they have
Fails their own will to please ;
For man would make no murmuring, were his will obey'd.

And why is it, that still
Man with his lot thus fights ?—
'Tis that he makes this *will*
The measure of his *rights*,
And believes Nature outraged if his will's gainsaid.

Couldst thou, Pausanias, learn
How deep a fault is this ;
Couldst thou but once discern
Thou hast no *right* to bliss,
No title from the Gods to welfare and repose ;

Then thou wouldst look less mazed
Whene'er of bliss debarr'd,
Nor think the Gods were crazed
When thy own lot went hard.
But we are all the same—the fools of [illegible]wn woes !

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For, from the first faint morn
Of life, the thirst for bliss
Deep in man's heart is born ;
And, sceptic as he is,
He fails not to judge clear if this be quench'd or no.

Nor is the thirst to blame.
Man errs not that he deems
His welfare his true aim,
He errs because he dreams
The world does but exist that welfare to bestow.

We mortals are no kings
For each of whom to sway
A new-made world up-springs,
Meant merely for his play ;
No, we are strangers here ; the world is from of old.

In vain our pent wills fret,
And would the world subdue.
Limits we did not set
Condition all we do ;
Born into life we are, and life must be our mould.

Born into life !—man grows
Forth from his parents' stem,
And blends their bloods, as those
Of theirs are blent in them ;
So each new man strikes root into a far fore-time.

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Born into life !—we bring
A bias with us here,
And, when here, each new thing
Affects us we come near ;
To tunes we did not call our being must keep chime.

Born into life !—in vain,
Opinions, those or these,
Unalter'd to retain
The obstinate mind decrees ;
Experience, like a sea, soaks all-effacing in.

Born into life !—who lists
May what is false hold dear,
And for himself make mists
Through which to see less clear ;
The world is what it is, for all our dust and din.

Born into life !—'tis we,
And not the world, are new ;
Our cry for bliss, our plea,
Others have urged it too—
Our wants have all been felt, our errors made before.

No eye could be too sound
To observe a world so vast,
No patience too profound
To sort what 's here amass'd ;
How man may here best live no care too great to explore.

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But we—as some rude guest
Would change, where'er he roam,
The manners there profess'd
To those he brings from home—
We mark not the world's course, but would have
it take *ours*.

The world's course proves the terms
On which man wins content;
Reason the proof confirms—
We spurn it, and invent
A false course for the world, and for ourselves,
false powers.

Riches we wish to get,
Yet remain spendthrifts still;
We would have health, and yet
Still use our bodies ill;
Bafflers of our own prayers, from youth to life's
last scenes.

We would have inward peace,
Yet will not look within;
We would have misery cease,
Yet will not cease from sin;
We want all pleasant ends, but will use no harsh
means;

We do not what we ought,
What we ought not, we do,

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And lean upon the thought
That chance will bring us through ;
But our own acts, for good or ill, are mightier powers.

Yet, even when man forsakes
All sin,—is just, is pure,
Abandons all which makes
His welfare insecure,—
Other existences there are, that clash with ours.

Like us, the lightning-fires
Love to have scope and play ;
The stream, like us, desires
An unimpeded way ;
Like us, the Libyan wind delights to roam at large.

Streams will not curb their pride
The just man not to entomb,
Nor lightnings go aside
To give his virtues room ;
Nor is that wind less rough which blows a good man's barge.

Nature, with equal mind,
Sees all her sons at play ;
Sees man control the wind,
The wind sweep man away ;
Allows the proudly-riding and the foundering bark.

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And, lastly, though of ours
No weakness spoil our lot,
Though the non-human powers
Of Nature harm us not,
The ill deeds of other men make often *our* life dark.

What were the wise man's plan?—
Through this sharp, toil-set life,
To work as best he can,
And win what's won by strife.—
But we an easier way to cheat our pains have found.

Scratch'd by a fall, with moans
As children of weak age
Lend life to the dumb stones
Whereon to vent their rage,
And bend their little fists, and rate the senseless ground;

So, loath to suffer mute,
We, peopling the void air,
Make Gods to whom to impute
The ills we ought to bear;
With God and Fate to rail at, suffering easily.

Yet grant—as sense long miss'd
Things that are now perceived,
And much may still exist
Which is not yet believed—
Grant that the world were full of Gods we cannot see;

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All things the world which fill
Of but one stuff are spun,
That we who rail are still,
With what we rail at, one ;
One with the o'erlabour'd Power that through
the breadth and length

Of earth, and air, and sea,
In men, and plants, and stones,
Hath toil perpetually,
And travails, pants, and moans ;
Fain would do all things well, but sometimes
fails in strength.

And patiently exact
This universal God
Alike to any act
Proceeds at any nod,
And quietly declaims the cursings of himself.

This is not what man hates,
Yet he can curse but this.
Harsh Gods and hostile Fates
Are dreams ! this only *is*—
Is everywhere ; sustains the wise, the foolish elf.

Nor only, in the intent
To attach blame elsewhere,
Do we at will invent
Stern Powers who make their care
To embitter human life, malignant Deities ;

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But, next, we would reverse
The scheme ourselves have spun,
And what we made to curse
We now would lean upon,
And feign kind Gods who perfect what man vainly tries.

Look, the world tempts our eye,
And we would know it all!
We map the starry sky,
We mine this earthen ball,
We measure the sea-tides, we number the sea-sands;

We scrutinise the dates
Of long-past human things,
The bounds of effaced states,
The lines of deceased kings;
We search out dead men's words, and works of dead men's hands;

We shut our eyes, and muse
How our own minds are made,
What springs of thought they use,
How righten'd, how betray'd—
And spend our wit to name what most employ unnamed.

But still, as we proceed
The mass swells more and more
Of volumes yet to read,

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Of secrets yet to explore.
Our hair grows grey, our eyes are dimm'd, our heat is tamed ;

We rest our faculties,
And thus address the Gods :
'True science if there is,
It stays in your abodes !
Man's measures cannot mete the immeasurable All.

'You only can take in
The world's immense design.
Our desperate search was sin,
Which henceforth we resign,
Sure only that your mind sees all things which befal.'

Fools ! That in man's brief term
He cannot all things view,
Affords no ground to affirm
That there are Gods who do ;
Nor does being weary prove that he has where to rest.

Again.—Our youthful blood
Claims rapture as its right ;
The world, a rolling flood
Of newness and delight,
Draws in the enamour'd gazer to its shining breast ;

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Pleasure, to our hot grasp,
Gives flowers after flowers;
With passionate warmth we clasp
Hand after hand in ours;
Now do we soon perceive how fast our youth is spent.

At once our eyes grow clear!
We see, in blank dismay,
Year posting after year,
Sense after sense decay;
Our shivering heart is mined by secret discontent;

Yet still, in spite of truth,
In spite of hopes entomb'd,
That longing of our youth
Burns ever unconsumed,
Still hungrier for delight as delights grow more rare.

We pause; we hush our heart,
And thus address the Gods:
'The world hath fail'd to impart
The joy our youth forebodes,
Fail'd to fill up the void which in our breasts we bear.

'Changeful till now, we still
Look'd on to something new;
Let us, with changeless will,
Henceforth look on to you,
To find with you the joy we in vain here require!'

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Fools! That so often here
Happiness mock'd our prayer,
I think, might make us fear
A like event elsewhere;
Make us, not fly to dreams, but moderate desire.

And yet, for those who know
Themselves, who wisely take
Their way through life, and bow
To what they cannot break,
Why should I say that life need yield but *moderate* bliss?

Shall we, with temper spoil'd,
Health sapp'd by living ill,
And judgment all embroil'd
By sadness and self-will,
Shall *we* judge what for man is not true bliss or is?

Is it so small a thing
To have enjoy'd the sun,
To have lived light in the spring,
To have loved, to have thought, to have done;
To have advanced true friends, and beat down baffling foes—

That we must feign a bliss
Of doubtful future date,
And, while we dream on this,
Lose all our present state,
And relegate to worlds yet distant our repose?

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Not much, I know, you prize
What pleasures may be had,
Who look on life with eyes
Estranged, like mine, and sad ;
And yet the village-churl feels the truth more
than you,

Who 's loath to leave this life
Which to him little yields—
His hard-task'd sunburnt wife,
His often-labour'd fields,
The boors with whom he talk'd, the country-
spots he knew.

But thou, because thou hear'st
Men scoff at Heaven and Fate,
Because the Gods thou fear'st
Fail to make blest thy state,
Tremblest, and wilt not dare to trust the joys
there are !

I say : Fear not ! Life still
Leaves human effort scope.
But, since life teems with ill,
Nurse no extravagant hope ;
Because thou must not dream, thou need'st not
then despair !

A long pause. At the end of it the notes of a harp below are again heard, and CALLICLES *sings :—*

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Far, far from here,
The Adriatic breaks in a warm bay
Among the green Illyrian hills; and there
The sunshine in the happy glens is fair,
And by the sea, and in the brakes.
The grass is cool, the sea-side air
Buoyant and fresh, the mountain flowers
More virginal and sweet than ours.
And there, they say, two bright and aged snakes,
Who once were Cadmus and Harmonia,
Bask in the glens or on the warm sea-shore,
In breathless quiet, after all their ills;
Nor do they see their country, nor the place
Where the Sphinx lived among the frowning hills,
Nor the unhappy palace of their race,
Nor Thebes, nor the Ismenus, any more.

There those two live, far in the Illyrian brakes!
They had stay'd long enough to see,
In Thebes, the billow of calamity
Over their own dear children roll'd,
Curse upon curse, pang upon pang,
For years, they sitting helpless in their home,
A grey old man and woman; yet of old
The Gods had to their marriage come,
And at the banquet all the Muses sang.

Therefore they did not end their days
In sight of blood; but were rapt, far away,
To where the west-wind plays,

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And murmurs of the Adriatic come
To those untrodden mountain-lawns; and there
Placed safely in changed forms, the pair
Wholly forget their first sad life, and home,
And all that Theban woe, and stray
For ever through the glens, placid and dumb.

Empedocles

That was my harp-player again!—where is he?
Down by the stream?

Pausanias

Yes, Master, in the wood.

Empedocles

He ever loved the Theban story well!
But the day wears. Go now, Pausanias,
For I must be alone. Leave me one mule;
Take down with thee the rest to Catana.
And for young Callicles, thank him from me;
Tell him, I never fail'd to love his lyre—
But he must follow me no more to-night.

Pausanias

Thou wilt return to-morrow to the city?

Empedocles

Either to-morrow or some other day,
In the sure revolutions of the world,

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Good friend, I shall revisit Catana.
I have seen many cities in my time,
Till mine eyes ache with the long spectacle,
And I shall doubtless see them all again;
Thou know'st me for a wanderer from of old.
Meanwhile, stay me not now. Farewell, Pausanias!

[*He departs on his way up the mountain.*

Pausanias (*alone*)

I dare not urge him further—he must go;
But he is strangely wrought!—I will speed back
And bring Peisianax to him from the city;
His counsel could once soothe him. But, Apollo!
How his brow lighten'd as the music rose!
Callicles must wait here, and play to him;
I saw him through the chestnuts far below,
Just since, down at the stream.—Ho! Callicles!

[*He descends, calling.*

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ACT II

Evening. The Summit of Etna.

EMPEDOCLES

Alone !—
On this charr'd, blacken'd, melancholy waste,
Crown'd by the awful peak, Etna's great mouth.
Round which the sullen vapour rolls—alone !
Pausanias is far hence, and that is well,
For I must henceforth speak no more with man.
He hath his lesson too, and that debt's paid ;
And the good, learned, friendly, quiet man,
May bravelier front his life, and in himself
Find henceforth energy and heart. But I—
The weary man, the banish'd citizen,
Whose banishment is not his greatest ill,
Whose weariness no energy can reach,
And for whose hurt courage is not the cure—
What should I do with life and living more ?

No, thou art come too late, Empedocles !
And the world hath the day, and must break thee,
Not thou the world. With men thou canst not live,
Their thoughts, their ways, their wishes, are not thine ;

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And being lonely thou art miserable,
For something has impair'd thy spirit's strength,
And dried its self-sufficing fount of joy.
Thou canst not live with men nor with thyself—
O sage! O sage!—Take then the one way left;
And turn thee to the elements, thy friends,
Thy well-tried friends, thy willing ministers,
And say: Ye helpers, hear Empedocles,
Who asks this final service at your hands!
Before the sophist-brood hath overlaid
The last spark of man's consciousness with words—
Ere quite the being of man, ere quite the world
Be disarray'd of their divinity—
Before the soul lose all her solemn joys,
And awe be dead, and hope impossible,
And the soul's deep eternal night come on—
Receive me, hide me, quench me, take me home!

He advances to the edge of the crater. Smoke and fire break forth with a loud noise, and CALLICLES *is heard below singing:—*

The lyre's voice is lovely everywhere;
In the court of Gods, in the city of men,
And in the lonely rock-strewn mountain-glen,
In the still mountain air.

Only to Typho it sounds hatefully;
To Typho only, the rebel o'erthrown,

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EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA

Through whose heart Etna drives her roots of
stone,
To imbed them in the sea.

Wherefore dost thou groan so loud?
Wherefore do thy nostrils flash,
Through the dark night, suddenly,
Typho, such red jets of flame?—
Is thy tortured heart still proud?
Is thy fire-scathed arm still rash?
Still alert thy stone-crush'd frame?
Doth thy fierce soul still deplore
Thine ancient rout by the Cilician hills,
And that curst treachery on the Mount of Gore?[9]
Do thy bloodshot eyes still weep
The fight which crown'd thine ills,
Thy last mischance on this Sicilian deep?
Hast thou sworn, in thy sad lair,
Where erst the strong sea-currents suck'd thee
down,
Never to cease to writhe, and try to rest,
Letting the sea-stream wander through thy hair?
That thy groans, like thunder prest,
Begin to roll, and almost drown
The sweet notes whose lulling spell
Gods and the race of mortals love so well,
When through thy caves thou hearest music swell?

But an awful pleasure bland
Spreading o'er the Thunderer's face,
When the sound climbs near his seat,

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The Olympian council sees ;
As he lets his lax right hand,
Which the lightnings doth embrace,
Sink upon his mighty knees.
And the eagle, at the beck
Of the appeasing, gracious harmony,
Droops all his sheeny, brown, deep-feather'd neck,
Nestling nearer to Jove's feet ;
While o'er his sovran eye
The curtains of the blue films slowly meet.
And the white Olympus-peaks
Rosily brighten, and the soothed Gods smile
At one another from their golden chairs,
And no one round the charmed circle speaks.
Only the loved Hebe bears
The cup about, whose draughts beguile
Pain and care, with a dark store
Of fresh-pull'd violets wreathed and nodding o'er ;
And her flush'd feet glow on the marble floor.

Empedocles

He fables, yet speaks truth !
The brave, impetuous heart yields everywhere
To the subtle, contriving head ;
Great qualities are trodden down,
And littleness united
Is become invincible.

These rumblings are not Typho's groans, I know !
These angry smoke-bursts

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Are not the passionate breath
Of the mountain-crush'd, tortured, intractable
Titan king—
But over all the world
What suffering is there not seen
Of plainness oppress'd by cunning,
As the well-counsell'd Zeus oppress'd
That self-helping son of earth!
What anguish of greatness,
Rail'd and hunted from the world,
Because its simplicity rebukes
This envious, miserable age!

I am weary of it.
—Lie there, ye ensigns
Of my unloved preëminence
In an age like this!
Among a people of children,
Who throng'd me in their cities,
Who worshipp'd me in their houses,
And ask'd, not wisdom,
But drugs to charm with,
But spells to mutter—
All the fool's-armoury of magic!—Lie there,
My golden circlet,
My purple robe!

Callicles (*from below*)

As the sky-brightening south-wind clears the day,
And makes the mass'd clouds roll,

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The music of the lyre blows away
The clouds which wrap the soul.

Oh ! that Fate had let me see
That triumph of the sweet persuasive lyre,
That famous, final victory,
When jealous Pan with Marsyas did conspire ;

When, from far Parnassus' side,
Young Apollo, all the pride
Of the Phrygian flutes to tame,
To the Phrygian highlands came ;
Where the long green reed-beds sway
In the rippled waters grey
Of that solitary lake
Where Mæander's springs are born ;
Whence the ridged pine-wooded roots
Of Messogis westward break,
Mounting westward, high and higher.
There was held the famous strife ;
There the Phrygian brought his flutes,
And Apollo brought his lyre ;
And, when now the westering sun
Touch'd the hills, the strife was done,
And the attentive Muses said :
'Marsyas, thou art vanquished !'
Then Apollo's minister
Hang'd upon a branching fir
Marsyas, that unhappy Faun,
And began to whet his knife.
But the Mænads, who were there,

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Left their friend, and with robes flowing
In the wind, and loose dark hair
O'er their polish'd bosoms blowing,
Each her ribbon'd tambourine
Flinging on the mountain-sod,
With a lovely frighten'd mien
Came about the youthful God.
But he turn'd his beauteous face
Haughtily another way,
From the grassy sun-warm'd place
Where in proud repose he lay,
With one arm over his head,
Watching how the whetting sped.

But aloof, on the lake-strand,
Did the young Olympus stand,
Weeping at his master's end;
For the Faun had been his friend.
For he taught him how to sing,
And he taught him flute-playing.
Many a morning had they gone
To the glimmering mountain-lakes,
And had torn up by the roots
The tall crested water-reeds
With long plumes and soft brown seeds,
And had carved them into flutes,
Sitting on a tabled stone
Where the shoreward ripple breaks.
And he taught him how to please
The red-snooded Phrygian girls,
Whom the summer evening sees

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Flashing in the dance's whirls
Underneath the starlit trees
In the mountain-villages.
Therefore now Olympus stands,
At his master's piteous cries
Pressing fast with both his hands
His white garment to his eyes,
Not to see Apollo's scorn ;—
Ah, poor Faun, poor Faun ! ah, poor Faun !

Empedocles

And lie thou there,
My laurel bough !
Scornful Apollo's ensign, lie thou there !
Though thou hast been my shade in the world's heat—
Though I have loved thee, lived in honouring thee—
Yet lie thou there,
My laurel bough !

I am weary of thee,
I am weary of the solitude
Where he who bears thee must abide—
Of the rocks of Parnassus,
Of the gorge of Delphi,
Of the moonlit peaks, and the caves.
Thou guardest them, Apollo !
Over the grave of the slain Pytho,
Though young, intolerably severe !

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Thou keepest aloof the profane,
But the solitude oppresses thy votary !
The jars of men reach him not in thy valley—
But can life reach him ?
Thou fencest him from the multitude—
Who will fence him from himself ?
He hears nothing but the cry of the torrents,
And the beating of his own heart.
The air is thin, the veins swell,
The temples tighten and throb there—
Air ! air !

Take thy bough, set me free from my solitude ;
I have been enough alone !

Where shall thy votary fly then ? back to men ?—
But they will gladly welcome him once more,
And help him to unbend his too tense thought,
And rid him of the presence of himself,
And keep their friendly chatter at his ear,
And haunt him, till the absence from himself,
That other torment, grow unbearable ;
And he will fly to solitude again,
And he will find its air too keen for him,
And so change back ; and many thousand times
Be miserably bandied to and fro
Like a sea-wave, betwixt the world and thee,
Thou young, implacable God ! and only death
Can cut his oscillations short, and so
Bring him to poise. There is no other way.

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And yet what days were those, Parmenides!
When we were young, when we could number friends
In all the Italian cities like ourselves,
When with elated hearts we join'd your train,
Ye Sun-born Virgins! on the road of truth.[10]
Then we could still enjoy, then neither thought
Nor outward things were closed and dead to us;
But we received the shock of mighty thoughts
On simple minds with a pure natural joy;
And if the sacred load oppress'd our brain,
We had the power to feel the pressure eased,
The brow unbound, the thoughts flow free again,
In the delightful commerce of the world.
We had not lost our balance then, nor grown
Thought's slaves, and dead to every natural joy.
The smallest thing could give us pleasure then—
The sports of the country-people,
A flute-note from the woods,
Sunset over the sea;
Seed-time and harvest,
The reapers in the corn,
The vinedresser in his vineyard,
The village-girl at her wheel.

Fulness of life and power of feeling, ye
Are for the happy, for the souls at ease,
Who dwell on a firm basis of content!
But he, who has outlived his prosperous days—
But he, whose youth fell on a different world
From that on which his exiled age is thrown—

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Whose mind was fed on other food, was train'd
By other rules than are in vogue to-day—
Whose habit of thought is fix'd, who will not change,
But, in a world he loves not, must subsist
In ceaseless opposition, be the guard
Of his own breast, fetter'd to what he guards,
That the world win no mastery over him—
Who has no friend, no fellow left, not one ;
Who has no minute's breathing space allow'd
To nurse his dwindling faculty of joy——
Joy and the outward world must die to him,
As they are dead to me.

A long pause, during which EMPEDOCLES *remains motionless, plunged in thought. The night deepens. He moves forward and gazes round him, and proceeds :—*

And you, ye stars,
Who slowly begin to marshal,
As of old, in the fields of heaven,
Your distant, melancholy lines !
Have you, too, survived yourselves ?
Are you, too, what I fear to become ?
You, too, once lived ;
You too moved joyfully
Among august companions,
In an older world, peopled by Gods,
In a mightier order,
The radiant, rejoicing, intelligent Sons of Heaven.
But now, ye kindle

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Your lonely, cold-shining lights,
Unwilling lingerers
In the heavenly wilderness,
For a younger, ignoble world ;
And renew, by necessity,
Night after night your courses,
In echoing, unnear'd silence,
Above a race you know not—
Uncaring and undelighted,
Without friend and without home ;
Weary like us, though not
Weary with our weariness.

No, no, ye stars ! there is no death with you,
No languor, no decay ! languor and death,
They are with me, not you ! ye are alive—
Ye, and the pure dark ether where ye ride
Brilliant above me ! And thou, fiery world,
That sapp'st the vitals of this terrible mount
Upon whose charr'd and quaking crust I stand—
Thou, too, brimmest with life !—the sea of cloud,
That heaves its white and billowy vapours up
To moat this isle of ashes from the world,
Lives ; and that other fainter sea, far down,
O'er whose lit floor a road of moonbeams leads
To Etna's Liparëan sister-fires
And the long dusky line of Italy—
That mild and luminous floor of waters lives,
With held-in joy swelling its heart ; I only,
Whose spring of hope is dried, whose spirit has
fail'd,

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I, who have not, like these, in solitude
Maintain'd courage and force, and in myself
Nursed an immortal vigour—I alone
Am dead to life and joy, therefore I read
In all things my own deadness.

A long silence. He continues :—

Oh, that I could glow like this mountain !
Oh, that my heart bounded with the swell of the sea !
Oh, that my soul were full of light as the stars !
Oh, that it brooded over the world like the air !

But no, this heart will glow no more ; thou art
A living man no more, Empedocles !
Nothing but a devouring flame of thought—
But a naked, eternally restless mind !

After a pause :—

To the elements it came from
Everything will return—
Our bodies to earth,
Our blood to water,
Heat to fire,
Breath to air.
They were well born, they will be well entomb'd—
But mind ? . . .

And we might gladly share the fruitful stir
Down in our mother earth's miraculous womb ;

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Well would it be
With what roll'd of us in the stormy main ;
We might have joy, blent with the all-bathing air,
Or with the nimble, radiant life of fire.

But mind, but thought—
If these have been the master part of us—
Where will *they* find their parent element ?
What will receive *them*, who will call *them* home ?
But we shall still be in them, and they in us,
And we shall be the strangers of the world,
And they will be our lords, as they are now ;
And keep us prisoners of our consciousness,
And never let us clasp and feel the All
But through their forms, and modes, and stifling veils.
And we shall be unsatisfied as now ;
And we shall feel the agony of thirst,
The ineffable longing for the life of life
Baffled for ever ; and still thought and mind
Will hurry us with them on their homeless march,
Over the unallied unopening earth,
Over the unrecognising sea ; while air
Will blow us fiercely back to sea and earth,
And fire repel us from its living waves.
And then we shall unwillingly return
Back to this meadow of calamity,
This uncongenial place, this human life ;
And in our individual human state
Go through the sad probation all again,

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To see if we will poise our life at last,
To see if we will now at last be true
To our own only true, deep-buried selves,
Being one with which we are one with the whole world;
Or whether we will once more fall away
Into some bondage of the flesh or mind,
Some slough of sense, or some fantastic maze
Forged by the imperious lonely thinking-power.
And each succeeding age in which we are born
Will have more peril for us than the last;
Will goad our senses with a sharper spur,
Will fret our minds to an intenser play,
Will make ourselves harder to be discern'd.
And we shall struggle awhile, gasp and rebel—
And we shall fly for refuge to past times,
Their soul of unworn youth, their breath of greatness;
And the reality will pluck us back,
Knead us in its hot hand, and change our nature.
And we shall feel our powers of effort flag,
And rally them for one last fight—and fail;
And we shall sink in the impossible strife,
And be astray for ever.

Slave of sense
I have in no wise been;—but slave of thought? . . .
And who can say: I have been always free,
Lived ever in the light of my own soul?—
I cannot; I have lived in wrath and gloom,

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Fierce, disputatious, ever at war with man,
Far from my own soul, far from warmth and
light.
But I have not grown easy in these bonds—
But I have not denied what bonds these were.
Yea, I take myself to witness,
That I have loved no darkness,
Sophisticated no truth,
Nursed no delusion,
Allow'd no fear!

And therefore, O ye elements! I know—
Ye know it too—it hath been granted me
Not to die wholly, not to be all enslaved.
I feel it in this hour. The numbing cloud
Mounts off my soul; I feel it, I breathe free.

Is it but for a moment?
—Ah, boil up, ye vapours!
Leap and roar, thou sea of fire!
My soul glows to meet you.
Ere it flag, ere the mists
Of despondency and gloom
Rush over it again,
Receive me, save me!

[*He plunges into the crater.*

Callicles (*from below*)

Through the black, rushing smoke-bursts,
Thick breaks the red flame;

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EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA

All Etna heaves fiercely
Her forest-clothed frame.

Not here, O Apollo!
Are haunts meet for thee.
But, where Helicon breaks down
In cliff to the sea,

Where the moon-silver'd inlets
Send far their light voice
Up the still vale of Thisbe,
O speed, and rejoice!

On the sward at the cliff-top
Lie strewn the white flocks,
On the cliff-side the pigeons
Roost deep in the rocks.

In the moonlight the shepherds,
Soft lull'd by the rills,
Lie wrapt in their blankets
Asleep on the hills.

—What forms are these coming
So white through the gloom?
What garments out-glistening
The gold-flower'd broom?

What sweet-breathing presence
Out-perfumes the thyme?
What voices enrapture
The night's balmy prime?—

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'Tis Apollo comes leading
His choir, the Nine.
—The leader is fairest,
But all are divine.

They are lost in the hollows !
They stream up again !
What seeks on this mountain
The glorified train ?—

They bathe on this mountain,
In the spring by their road ;
Then on to Olympus,
Their endless abode.

—Whose praise do they mention ?
Of what is it told ?—
What will be for ever ;
What was from of old.

First hymn they the Father
Of all things ; and then,
The rest of immortals,
The action of men.

The day in his hotness,
The strife with the palm ;
The night in her silence,
The stars in their calm.

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LATER POEMS

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WESTMINSTER ABBEY

JULY 25, 1881

(The Day of Burial, in the Abbey, of ARTHUR PENRHYN STANLEY, *Dean of Westminster)*

WHAT! for a term so scant
Our shining visitant
Cheer'd us, and now is pass'd into the night?
Couldst thou no better keep, O Abbey old,
The boon thy dedication-sign foretold,[11]
The presence of that gracious inmate, light?—
A child of light appear'd;
Hither he came, late-born and long-desired,
And to men's hearts this ancient place endear'd;
What, is the happy glow so soon expired?

—Rough was the winter eve;
Their craft the fishers leave,
And down over the Thames the darkness drew.
One still lags last, and turns, and eyes the Pile
Huge in the gloom, across in Thorney Isle,

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King Sebert's work, the wondrous Minster new.
—'Tis Lambeth now, where then
They moor'd their boats among the bulrush stems;
And that new Minster in the matted fen
The world-famed Abbey by the westering
Thames.

His mates are gone, and he
For mist can scarcely see
A strange wayfarer coming to his side—
Who bade him loose his boat, and fix his oar,
And row him straightway to the further
shore,
And wait while he did there a space abide.
The fisher awed obeys,
That voice had note so clear of sweet command;
Through pouring tide he pulls, and drizzling
haze,
And sets his freight ashore on Thorney strand.

The Minster's outlined mass
Rose dim from the morass,
And thitherward the stranger took his way.
Lo, on a sudden all the Pile is bright!
Nave, choir and transept glorified with light,
While tongues of fire on coign and carving play!
And heavenly odours fair
Come streaming with the floods of glory in,
And carols float along the happy air,
As if the reign of joy did now begin.

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Then all again is dark ;
And by the fisher's bark
The unknown passenger returning stands.
O Saxon fisher ! thou hast had with thee
The fisher from the Lake of Galilee—
So saith he, blessing him with outspread hands ;
Then fades, but speaks the while :
At dawn thou to King Sebert shalt relate
How his St. Peter's Church in Thorney Isle
Peter, his friend, with light did consecrate.

Twelve hundred years and more
Along the holy floor
Pageants have pass'd, and tombs of mighty kings
Efface the humbler graves of Sebert's line,
And, as years sped, the minster-aisles divine
Grew used to the approach of Glory's wings.
Arts came, and arms, and law,
And majesty, and sacred form and fear ;
Only that primal guest the fisher saw,
Light, only light, was slow to reappear.

The Saviour's happy light,
Wherein at first was dight
His boon of life and immortality,
In desert ice of subtleties was spent
Or drown'd in mists of childish wonder-
ment,
Fond fancies here, there false philosophy !
And harsh the temper grew

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Of men with mind thus darken'd and astray ;
And scarce the boon of life could struggle through,
For want of light which should the boon convey.

Yet in this latter time
The promise of the prime
Seem'd to come true at last, O Abbey old !
It seem'd, a child of light did bring the dower
Foreshown thee in thy consecration-hour,
And in thy courts his shining freight unroll'd :
Bright wits, and instincts sure,
And goodness warm, and truth without alloy,
And temper sweet, and love of all things pure,
And joy in light, and power to spread the joy.

And on that countenance bright
Shone oft so high a light,
That to my mind there came how, long ago,
Lay on the hearth, amid a fiery ring,
The charm'd babe of the Eleusinian king[12]—
His nurse, the Mighty Mother, will'd it so.
Warm in her breast, by day,
He slumber'd, and ambrosia balm'd the child ;
But all night long amid the flames he lay,
Upon the hearth, and play'd with them, and smiled.

But once, at midnight deep,
His mother woke from sleep,

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And saw her babe amidst the fire, and scream'd.
A sigh the Goddess gave, and with a frown
Pluck'd from the fire the child, and laid him down;
Then raised her face, and glory round her stream'd.
The mourning-stole no more
Mantled her form, no more her head was bow'd;
But raiment of celestial sheen she wore,
And beauty fill'd her, and she spake aloud :—

'O ignorant race of man!
Achieve your good who can,
If your own hands the good begun undo?
Had human cry not marr'd the work divine,
Immortal had I made this boy of mine;
But now his head to death again is due
And I have now no power
Unto this pious household to repay
Their kindness shown me in my wandering hour.'
—She spake, and from the portal pass'd away.

The Boy his nurse forgot,
And bore a mortal lot.
Long since, his name is heard on earth no more.
In some chance battle on Cithæron-side
The nursling of the Mighty Mother died,
And went where all his fathers went before.
—On thee too, in thy day
Of childhood, Arthur! did some check have power,

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That, radiant though thou wert, thou couldst
but stay,
Bringer of heavenly light, a human hour?

Therefore our happy guest
Knew care, and knew unrest,
And weakness warn'd him, and he fear'd decline.
And in the grave he laid a cherish'd wife,
And men ignoble harass'd him with strife,
And deadly airs his strength did undermine.
Then from his Abbey fades
The sound beloved of his victorious breath;
And light's fair nursling stupor first invades,
And next the crowning impotence of death.

But hush! This mournful strain,
Which would of death complain,
The oracle forbade, not ill-inspired.—
That Pair, whose head did plan, whose hands
did forge
The Temple in the pure Parnassian gorge,[12]
Finish'd their work, and then a meed required.
'Seven days,' the God replied,
'Live happy, then expect your perfect meed!'
Quiet in sleep, the seventh night, they died.
Death, death was judged the boon supreme
indeed.

And truly he who here
Hath run his bright career,
And served men nobly, and acceptance found,

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And borne to light and right his witness high,
What could he better wish than then to die,
And wait the issue, sleeping underground?
Why should he pray to range
Down the long age of truth that ripens slow;
And break his heart with all the baffling change,
And all the tedious tossing to and fro?

For this and that way swings
The flux of mortal things,
Though moving inly to one far-set goal.—
What had our Arthur gain'd, to stop and see,
After light's term, a term of cecity,
A Church once large and then grown strait in soul?
To live, and see arise,
Alternating with wisdom's too short reign,
Folly revived, re-furbish'd sophistries,
And pullulating rites externe and vain?

Ay me! 'Tis deaf, that ear
Which joy'd my voice to hear;
Yet would I not disturb thee from thy tomb,
Thus sleeping in thine Abbey's friendly shade,
And the rough waves of life for ever laid!
I would not break thy rest, nor change thy doom.
Even as my father, thou—

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Even as that loved, that well-recorded friend—
Hast thy commission done; ye both may now
Wait for the leaven to work, the let to end.

And thou, O Abbey grey!
Predestined to the ray
By this dear guest over thy precinct shed—
Fear not but that thy light once more shall burn,
Once more thine immemorial gleam return,
Though sunk be now this bright, this gracious head!
Let but the light appear
And thy transfigured walls be touch'd with flame—
Our Arthur will again be present here,
Again from lip to lip will pass his name.

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GEIST'S GRAVE

Four years !—and didst thou stay above
The ground, which hides thee now, but four?
And all that life, and all that love,
Were crowded, Geist ! into no more?

Only four years those winning ways,
Which make me for thy presence yearn,
Call'd us to pet thee or to praise,
Dear little friend ! at every turn ?

That loving heart, that patient soul,
Had they indeed no longer span,
To run their course, and reach their goal,
And read their homily to man ?

That liquid, melancholy eye,
From whose pathetic, soul-fed springs
Seem'd surging the Virgilian cry,*
The sense of tears in mortal things—

* *Sunt lacrimæ rerum !*

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That steadfast, mournful strain, consoled
By spirits gloriously gay,
And temper of heroic mould—
What, was four years their whole short day?

Yes, only four!—and not the course
Of all the centuries yet to come,
And not the infinite resource
Of Nature, with her countless sum

Of figures, with her fulness vast
Of new creation evermore,
Can ever quite repeat the past,
Or just thy little self restore.

Stern law of every mortal lot!
Which man, proud man, finds hard to bear,
And builds himself I know not what
Of second life I know not where.

But thou, when struck thine hour to go,
On us, who stood despondent by,
A meek last glance of love didst throw,
And humbly lay thee down to die.

Yet would we keep thee in our heart—
Would fix our favourite on the scene,
Nor let thee utterly depart
And be as if thou ne'er hadst been.

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GEIST'S GRAVE

And so there rise these lines of verse
On lips that rarely form them now ;
While to each other we rehearse :
Such ways, such arts, such looks hadst thou !

We stroke thy broad brown paws again,
We bid thee to thy vacant chair,
We greet thee by the window-pane,
We hear thy scuffle on the stair.

We see the flaps of thy large ears
Quick raised to ask which way we go ;
Crossing the frozen lake, appears
Thy small black figure on the snow !

Nor to us only art thou dear
Who mourn thee in thine English home ;
Thou hast thine absent master's tear,
Dropt by the far Australian foam.

Thy memory lasts both here and there,
And thou shalt live as long as we.
And after that—thou dost not care !
In us was all the world to thee.

Yet, fondly zealous for thy fame,
Even to a date beyond our own
We strive to carry down thy name,
By mounded turf, and graven stone.

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We lay thee, close within our reach,
Here, where the grass is smooth and warm,
Between the holly and the beech,
Where oft we watch'd thy couchant form,

Asleep, yet lending half an ear
To travellers on the Portsmouth road ;—
There build we thee, O guardian dear,
Mark'd with a stone, thy last abode !

Then some, who through this garden pass,
When we too, like thyself, are clay,
Shall see thy grave upon the grass,
And stop before the stone, and say :

People who lived here long ago
Did by this stone, it seems, intend
To name for future times to know
The dachshound, Geist, their little friend.

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POOR MATTHIAS

Poor Matthias!—Found him lying
Fall'n beneath his perch and dying?
Found him stiff, you say, though warm—
All convulsed his little form?
Poor canary! many a year
Well he knew his mistress dear;
Now in vain you call his name,
Vainly raise his rigid frame,
Vainly warm him in your breast,
Vainly kiss his golden crest,
Smooth his ruffled plumage fine,
Touch his trembling beak with wine.
One more gasp—it is the end!
Dead and mute our tiny friend!
—Songster thou of many a year,
Now thy mistress brings thee here,
Says, it fits that I rehearse,
Tribute due to thee, a verse,
Meed for daily song of yore
Silent now for evermore.

Poor Matthias! Wouldst thou have
More than pity? claim'st a stave?

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—Friends more near us than a bird
We dismiss'd without a word.
Rover, with the good brown head,
Great Atossa, they are dead ;
Dead, and neither prose nor rhyme
Tells the praises of their prime.
Thou didst know them old and grey,
Know them in their sad decay.
Thou hast seen Atossa sage
Sit for hours beside thy cage ;
Thou wouldst chirp, thou foolish bird,
Flutter, chirp—she never stirr'd !
What were now these toys to her ?
Down she sank amid her fur ;
Eyed thee with a soul resign'd—
And thou deemedst cats were kind !
—Cruel, but composed and bland,
Dumb, inscrutable and grand,
So Tiberius might have sat,
Had Tiberius been a cat.

Rover died—Atossa too.
Less than they to us are you !
Nearer human were their powers,
Closer knit their life with ours.
Hands had stroked them, which are cold,
Now for years, in churchyard mould ;
Comrades of our past were they,
Of that unreturning day.
Changed and aging, they and we
Dwelt, it seem'd, in sympathy.

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Alway from their presence broke
Somewhat which remembrance woke
Of the loved, the lost, the young—
Yet they died, and died unsung.

Geist came next, our little friend ;
Geist had verse to mourn his end.
Yes, but that enforcement strong
Which compell'd for Geist a song—
All that gay courageous cheer,
All that human pathos dear ;
Soul-fed eyes with suffering worn,
Pain heroically borne,
Faithful love in depth divine—
Poor Matthias, were they thine ?

Max and Kaiser we to-day
Greet upon the lawn at play ;
Max a dachshound without blot—
Kaiser should be, but is not.
Max, with shining yellow coat,
Prinking ears and dewlap throat—
Kaiser, with his collie face,
Penitent for want of race.
—Which may be the first to die,
Vain to augur, they or I !
But, as age comes on, I know,
Poet's fire gets faint and low ;
If so be that travel they
First the inevitable way,

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Much I doubt if they shall have
Dirge from me to crown their grave.

Yet, poor bird, thy tiny corse
Moves me, somehow, to remorse ;
Something haunts my conscience, brings
Sad, compunctious visitings.
Other favourites, dwelling here,
Open lived to us, and near ;
Well we knew when they were glad,
Plain we saw if they were sad,
Joy'd with them when they were gay,
Soothed them in their last decay ;
Sympathy could feel and show
Both in weal of theirs and woe.

Birds, companions more unknown,
Live beside us, but alone ;
Finding not, do all they can,
Passage from their souls to man.
Kindness we bestow, and praise,
Laud their plumage, greet their lays ;
Still, beneath their feather'd breast,
Stirs a history unexpress'd.
Wishes there, and feelings strong,
Incommunicably throng ;
What they want, we cannot guess,
Fail to track their deep distress—
Dull look on when death is nigh,
Note no change, and let them die.

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POOR MATTHIAS

Poor Matthias! couldst thou speak,
What a tale of thy last week!
Every morning did we pay
Stupid salutations gay,
Suited well to health, but how
Mocking, how incongruous now!
Cake we offer'd, sugar, seed,
Never doubtful of thy need;
Praised, perhaps, thy courteous eye,
Praised thy golden livery.
Gravely thou the while, poor dear!
Sat'st upon thy perch to hear,
Fixing with a mute regard
Us, thy human keepers hard,
Troubling, with our chatter vain,
Ebb of life, and mortal pain—
Us, unable to divine
Our companion's dying sign,
Or o'erpass the severing sea
Set betwixt ourselves and thee,
Till the sand thy feathers smirch
Fallen dying off thy perch!

Was it, as the Grecian sings,
Birds were born the first of things,
Before the sun, before the wind,
Before the gods, before mankind,
Airy, ante-mundane throng—
Witness their unworldly song!
Proof they give, too, primal powers,
Of a prescience more than ours—

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Teach us, while they come and go,
When to sail, and when to sow.
Cuckoo calling from the hill,
Swallow skimming by the mill,
Swallows trooping in the sedge,
Starlings swirling from the hedge,
Mark the seasons, map our year,
As they show and disappear.
But, with all this travail sage
Brought from that anterior age,
Goes an unreversed decree
Whereby strange are they and we ;
Making want of theirs, and plan,
Indiscernible by man.

No, away with tales like these
Stol'n from Aristophanes ![14]
Does it, if we miss your mind,
Prove us so remote in kind ?
Birds ! we but repeat on you
What amongst ourselves we do.
Somewhat more or somewhat less,
'Tis the same unskilfulness.
What you feel, escapes our ken—
Know we more our fellow men ?
Human suffering at our side,
Ah, like yours is undescried !
Human longings, human fears,
Miss our eyes and miss our ears.
Little helping, wounding much,
Dull of heart, and hard of touch,

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POOR MATTHIAS

Brother man's despairing sign
Who may trust us to divine?
Who assure us, sundering powers
Stand not 'twixt his soul and ours?

Poor Matthias! See, thy end
What a lesson doth it lend!
For that lesson thou shalt have,
Dead canary bird, a stave!
Telling how, one stormy day,
Stress of gale and showers of spray
Drove my daughter small and me
Inland from the rocks and sea.
Driv'n inshore, we follow down
Ancient streets of Hastings town—
Slowly thread them—when behold,
French canary-merchant old
Shepherding his flock of gold
In a low dim-lighted pen
Scann'd of tramps and fishermen!
There a bird, high-coloured, fat,
Proud of port, though something squat—
Pursy, play'd-out Philistine—
Dazzled Nelly's youthful eyne.
But, far in, obscure, there stirr'd
On his perch a sprightlier bird,
Courteous-eyed, erect and slim;
And I whisper'd: 'Fix on *him!*'
Home we brought him, young and fair,
Songs to trill in Surrey air.
Here Matthias sang his fill,

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Saw the cedars of Pains Hill ;
Here he pour'd his little soul,
Heard the murmur of the Mole.
Eight in number now the years
He hath pleased our eyes and ears ;
Other favourites he hath known
Go, and now himself is gone.
—Fare thee well, companion dear !
Fare for ever well, nor fear,
Tiny though thou art, to stray
Down the uncompanion'd way !
We without thee, little friend,
Many years have not to spend ;
What are left, will hardly be
Better than we spent with thee.

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KAISER DEAD

April 6, 1887

What, Kaiser dead? The heavy news
Post-haste to Cobham calls the Muse,
From where in Farringford she brews
The ode sublime,
Or with Pen-bryn's bold bard pursues
A rival rhyme.

Kai's bracelet tail, Kai's busy feet,
Were known to all the village-street.
'What, poor Kai dead?' say all I meet;
'A loss indeed!'
O for the croon pathetic, sweet,
Of Robin's reed![15]

Six years ago I brought him down,
A baby dog, from London town;
Round his small throat of black and brown
A ribbon blue,
And vouch'd by glorious renown
A dachshound true.

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His mother, most majestic dame,
Of blood-unmix'd, from Potsdam came ;
And Kaiser's race we deem'd the same—
No lineage higher.
And so he bore the imperial name.
But ah, his sire !

Soon, soon the days conviction bring.
The collie hair, the collie swing,
The tail's indomitable ring,
The eye's unrest—
The case was clear ; a mongrel thing
Kai stood confest.

But all those virtues, which commend
The humbler sort who serve and tend,
Were thine in store, thou faithful friend.
What sense, what cheer !
To us, declining tow'rds our end,
A mate how dear !

For Max, thy brother-dog, began
To flag, and feel his narrowing span.
And cold, besides, his blue blood ran,
Since, 'gainst the classes,
He heard, of late, the Grand Old Man
Incite the masses.

Yes, Max and we grew slow and sad ;
But Kai, a tireless shepherd-lad,
Teeming with plans, alert, and glad

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KAISER DEAD

In work or play,
Like sunshine went and came, and bade
Live out the day !

Still, still I see the figure smart—
Trophy in mouth, agog to start,
Then, home return'd, once more depart ;
Or prest together
Against thy mistress, loving heart,
In winter weather.

I see the tail, like bracelet twirl'd,
In moments of disgrace uncurl'd,
Then at a pardoning word re-furl'd,
A conquering sign ;
Crying, 'Come on, and range the world,
And never pine.'

Thine eye was bright, thy coat it shone ;
Thou hadst thine errands, off and on ;
In joy thy last morn flew ; anon,
A fit ! All's over ;
And thou art gone where Geist hath gone,
And Toss, and Rover.

Poor Max, with downcast, reverent head,
Regards his brother's form outspread ;
Full well Max knows the friend is dead
Whose cordial talk,
And jokes in doggish language said,
Beguiled his walk.

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And Glory, stretch'd at Burwood gate,
Thy passing by doth vainly wait ;
And jealous Jock, thy only hate,
The chiel from Skye,
Lets from his shaggy Highland pate
Thy memory die.

Well, fetch his graven collar fine,
And rub the steel, and make it shine,
And leave it round thy neck to twine,
Kai, in thy grave.
There of thy master keep that sign,
And this plain stave.

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NOTES

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NOTES

Note 1, Page 3

My Marguerite smiles upon the strand

See in the first volume, among 'Early Poems,' the poem called 'A Memory-Picture.'

Note 2, Page 33

The Hunter of the Tanagræan Field

Orion, the Wild Huntsman of Greek legend, and in this capacity appearing in both earth and sky.

Note 3, Page 35

O'er the sun-redden'd western straits

Erytheia, the legendary region around the Pillars of Hercules, probably took its name from the redness of the West under which the Greeks saw it.

Note 4, Page 121

That son of Italy who tried to blow

Giacopone di Todi.

Note 5, Page 131

Recalls the obscure opposer he outweigh'd

Gilbert de la Porrée, at the Council of Rheims, in 1148.

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NOTES

Note 6, Page 133

Of that unpitying Phrygian sect which cried

The Montanists.

Note 7, Page 134

Monica

See St. Augustine's *Confessions*, book ix. chap. xi.

Note 8, Page 236

And the kind, chance-arrived Wanderer

Poias, the father of Philoctetes. Passing near, he was attracted by the concourse round the pyre, and at the entreaty of Hercules set fire to it, receiving the bow and arrows of the hero as his reward.

Note 9, Page 279

And that curst treachery on the Mount of Gore

Mount Hæmus, so called, said the legend, from Typho's blood spilt on it in his last battle with Zeus, when the giant's strength failed, owing to the Destinies having a short time before given treacherously to him, for his refreshment, perishable fruits. See Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, book i. chap. vi.

Note 10, Page 286

Ye Sun-born Virgins! on the road of truth

See the Fragments of Parmenides:

. . . . . κοῦραι δ' ὁδὸν ἡγεμόνευον,
ἠλίαδες κοῦραι, προλιποῦσαι δώματα νυκτός,
εἰς φάος . . . . . .

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NOTES

Note 11, Page 297

Couldst thou no better keep, O Abbey old,
The boon thy dedication-sign foretold.

'Ailred of Rievaulx, and several other writers, assert that Sebert, king of the East Saxons and nephew of Ethelbert, founded the Abbey of Westminster very early in the seventh century.

'Sulcardus, who lived in the time of William the Conqueror, gives a minute account of the miracle supposed to have been worked at the consecration of the Abbey.

'The church had been prepared against the next day for dedication. On the night preceding, St. Peter appeared on the opposite side of the water to a fisherman, desiring to be conveyed to the farther shore. Having left the boat, St. Peter ordered the fisherman to wait, promising him a reward on his return. An innumerable host from heaven accompanied the apostle, singing choral hymns, while everything was illuminated with a supernatural light. The dedication having been completed, St. Peter returned to the fisherman, quieted his alarm at what had passed, and announced himself as the apostle. He directed the fisherman to go as soon as it was day to the authorities, to state what he had seen and heard, and to inform them that, in corroboration of his testimony, they would find the marks of consecration on the walls of the church. In obedience to the apostle's direction, the fisherman waited on Mellitus, bishop of London, who, going to the church, found not only marks of the chrism, but of the tapers with which the church had been illuminated. Mellitus, therefore, desisted from proceeding to a new consecration, and contented himself with the celebration of the mass.'—Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (edition of 1817), vol. i. pp. 265, 266. See also Montalembert, *Les Moines d'Occident*, vol. iii. pp. 428-432.

Note 12, Page 300

The charm'd babe of the Eleusinian king

Demophoön, son of Celeus, king of Eleusis. See, in the *Homeric Hymns*, the 'Hymn to Demeter,' 184-298.

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NOTES

NOTE 13, Page 302

That Pair, whose head did plan, whose hands did forge
The Temple in the pure Parnassian gorge.

Agamedes and Trophonius, the builders of the temple of Apollo at Delphi. See PLUTARCH, *Consolatio ad Apollonium*, c. 14.

NOTE 14, Page 314

Stol'n from Aristophanes

See *The Birds* of Aristophanes, 465-485.

NOTE 15, Page 317

Of Robin's reed

'Come, join the melancholious croon
O' Robin's reed.'—BURNS, *Poor Mailie's Elegy*.

END OF VOL. II

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